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SPEEDING SWIFTLY ALONG TO THE PONIES, SATAN SAM SPRUNG ON THE BACK OF
ONE AND FLED.

NEW YORK NAT
IN COLORADO;
OR,

Gentleman Jack's Resurrection.

A STORY OF
New York and Junction City.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "NEW YORK NAT DETECTIVE
SERIES," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A TENDERFOOT TO THE RESCUE.

THE stage-coach to the mining-camp of
Nugget City, was nearing the station on the
Union Pacific, to which it made weekly runs,
when, sharp and stern, the command rang
out:

"Halt that old hearse, quick! and hands up all of you!"

Fred Fox, the driver, was a man of sense and at once drew rein, only too well aware that road-agents were not to be trifled with, that they killed for gold, so he pulled up his horses with the remark:

"We are in for it, pard!"

The one addressed was a youth, with slender but athletic form, a bold, handsome face and the demeanor of one who had nerve and pluck far beyond his years. And yet, he was, pure and simple, a tenderfoot, and looked out of place in that wild land of the far West.

He sat on the box with the driver and had listened to the most terrible stories of the border and Overland, some of them true, some made up just to harrow the soul of the young passenger, for Fred Fox delighted in frightening his passengers, and little dreamed of a "hold-up" on his drive that day, for a road-agent had not been seen on his run for many a day.

Within the coach were four persons, two men in miner's garb, and two youths, who also looked new to the country.

The miners dropped their hands upon their revolvers, at the command to halt, but, at the stopping of the coach, and the appearance of five masked men, one of the miners said, in a low tone:

"It's no use, pard; they've got the drop on us, sart'in."

"Well, they'll get little from me, and I only hope the rest of you are as lucky as I am," answered his companion, a tall, fine-looking young man with a free and easy air, and a daring expression upon his face.

"Come out of that, all of you, for there is one in there I want, and the gold you carry I'll take, too!"

"The man who resists will die. I've got you covered by a dozen men in ambush; so hustle out, all of you!"

"You must do it, pard, for it's no use to fight ag'in' it," cried Fred Fox, from above.

"Here goes!" and the young miner, with a light laugh, sprung out of the coach, the older man following him more slowly, uttering an imprecation at having to do so.

"Come, tenderfoot, you climb down from your perch, for I spare no one!" called out the masked leader, and turning to the young miner he continued:

"Your name is Gentleman Jack, and you are the man I want, so you go with us."

"Where to?"

"That is my business, it is yours to obey or become a corpus, so hold out your hands for these bracelets!"

The young miner's face slightly paled, his eyes flashed, and, for an instant, he seemed about to resist; but he saw that four men covered him with revolvers, while the leader held the handcuffs before his face.

"All right; I'm not one to kick against fate," he said indifferently, and held out his hands for the irons.

But, as he did so, there came a flash and crack from the top of the coach and the leader dropped dead in his tracks, while a second and third report rung out in quick succession, and two more of the outlaws fell, one of them dead the other wounded badly.

Quick as a flash the young miner saw his chance and drew his revolver, just as, over his head, other shots rung out, and the outlaws, firing at random in their surprise, fled, the leader's boasted numbers proving to be but six men.

Shots were fired after their retreating forms; then all turned to see who it was who had so boldly fired upon the outlaws.

"It war not me, pard, but this here tenderfoot youngster, and, durned ef he didn't plant ther lead in ther head o' them fellers, each time."

"Say, young feller, I was playin' you for

a fool, and all the time you know'd I was the idiot," and Fred Fox grasped the hand of the youth who answered.

"I did not believe there were more than we saw, and as they were six we were on equal terms, so I opened fire."

"And you saved me from what I do not know. I appreciate it; but, driver, let us sling these bodies on top the coach and push on."

"You bet I will!" returned Fred Fox, "for we'd better get a move on us."

So the two dead men were put on top of the "hearse" while the wounded man, who was still unconscious, was placed inside.

Then Fox cracked his long lash sharply and made a rapid run for the station.

"May I ask your name, young pard?" queried the young miner, who had also taken a seat up with the driver.

"Where I live they call me New York Nat," was the reply.

"Ah! I, too, am a New Yorker, and years ago was known as Jack Hammond, but out here the boys call me Gentleman Jack."

"We must be friends, New York Nat, and good ones, too," and Gentleman Jack held out his hand, while Fred Fox muttered:

"And I took him for a tenderfoot!"

"I'm a durned fool, and is going to ter git myself branded as such."

CHAPTER II.

A SUSPICIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

THE coach rolled into Wayside City, as the railroad station was called, and New York Nat was a hero in the eyes of all, though he modestly shrunk from the praise bestowed upon him.

The two youths who had been in the coach, and so promptly backed him up in the attack on the outlaws, proved to be his companions.

The three had been out in the mining country to seek their fortunes, and said that, though they had not become millionaires, they had at least made some money, and now were on their way back to their homes in New York.

Jack Hammond, the young miner, seemed particularly drawn toward New York Nat, and told him that he also was returning to his home, having laid up enough money to pay some debts he owed, with interest, and have enough left to go into business.

"We will take the train to-morrow morning, and go out together, pard," he announced to Nat, when they parted for the night.

But, the next morning Gentleman Jack was not to be found anywhere!

His bed had not been slept in, and the night clerk reported that a man had called for him after midnight, and he had gone out with him, but had not returned.

His things were in his room as he had left them, but, what had become of him no one knew.

As the three boy miners were very anxious to go East, they decided to start that afternoon on the Express, New York Nat leaving a letter for his new friend saying where he could find him in New York.

It was the night after their arrival in New York City, that a strange crowd of youths, ranging in age from twelve to twenty years, and attired in a most diversified style of costume, from the clerical student and fashionable dude to the boothblack and boy vagabond, were assembled in a large room on the top floor of an old-time mansion in the city of New York.

The mansion dated back to the past century, was surrounded by several acres of grounds, completely overgrown, and adjoined a graveyard long since deserted.

As the place had a weird history, and was popularly believed to be haunted, it was

shunned as a plague-spot would have been, save by the band of Boy Police—a party of Unknown Ferrets, who acknowledged New York Nat as their chief.

When in New York the young leader of the Unknown Ferrets made the old mansion his home, living there all alone, save a large dog that served as a sentinel and keeper.

Now the Ferrets had assembled to greet their leader and the companions who had been to the Wild West on a Secret Service expedition.

In the assembly room the whole band of the Unknown Ferrets were gathered, seated on benches and facing their captain, who sat at a table upon which were a lamp, some books, and papers.

By his side sat the Mascot of the Ferrets, dressed in black and wearing a close fitting vail, for she was unknown to any one of the band save New York Nat, whose sister she was.

Calling the meeting to order New York Nat spoke:

"Boys, I am glad to get back to you once more, and let me tell you that our expedition was a most successful one, as you will know when I tell you that our Mascot Queen has in the treasury the money paid me for our services.

"I must also state that my comrades, Keno and Freckles, rendered me most valuable services throughout.

"But now, let me make known to you another expedition that I have decided to go upon at once, and which I happened to discover by an accident.

"On our way back from the mines our coach was held up by road-agents, and believing that they were fewer than they claimed to be, and as they were going to kidnap a handsome young miner, I opened fire; the others backed me up and the outlaws ran off.

"The young miner told me his name and said he was coming East; but that night he mysteriously disappeared and we came on without him.

"Now, I made up my mind that the outlaws had some deep reason for capturing the miner; and failing on the trail, they got him into their power that night by subterfuge.

"When on my way to New York I saw in a paper which I bought on the train an advertisement calling upon this very young miner to return home, as it was a matter of life and death that demanded it, while a fortune also awaited him.

"Now, boy pards, you have all done so well in my absence, with the Mascot Queen here as your captain, that I have decided to return to the West, with Keno and Freckles as my comrades, and hunt up that young miner; but first, I will go to the address given in the advertisement and see just what the situation is."

This story of New York Nat was listened to with the deepest interest by all, for the young Ferrets were proud of their chief, and knew that he had accomplished much on his trip to the interior and Wild West—that he had found a missing millionaire, who had been kidnapped from his home—that he had run down the kidnappers to their dire disaster, and had enriched the Boy Police band by the rewards he received, all of which had been turned into their common treasury.

So when this young chief said he was going off on another trail, the Ferrets were more than willing, for they knew that their Vailed Girl Mascot was a good captain to act in their young chief's place.

After telling the band to still do all in their power to keep their identity from the police, and to remain as Unknown Ferrets until the right time to disclose who they were and their motive for secrecy, New York Nat dismissed the band and all departed, leaving him alone in the old mansion with the Girl Mascot and the huge dog.

CHAPTER III.

HELEN BENSON'S VISITORS.

WHEN left alone with his sister, who had so cleverly kept her identity from the band, and not one of whom had ever seen her face unveiled, New York Nat said:

"Now, Olive, I have something to say to you I did not make known to the boys."

"Yes, brother," and as Olive spoke she removed her mask-like veil, revealing a young and beautiful face, full of intelligence and strongly marked characteristics.

"Are you willing, in the discharge of your duty, to have a menial position where you can also play the part of a detective?"

"I am ready to do anything, brother, you think best."

"I was very sure, Olive, that you were, but I fear you will not find this position a pleasant one."

"Tell me what I am to do, Nat, and, be it what it may, I will undertake it, for remember I am just as much a ferret as any of the boys."

"In yesterday's *Herald*," continued Nat, "I saw an advertisement for a lady's maid, and it said apply to the very same address where Jack Hammond, the missing miner, was to come or write."

"That is strange, very strange," said Olive.

"Yes, it is so strange that I wish you to play the little detective for me in that house."

"I will go, Nat."

"You will have to apply for the position of lady's maid, and then keep your eyes open to find out all that occurs."

"I shall also go there in the morning to see the one whose name was signed to the advertisement in the *Herald* for Jack Hammond to return home."

"I understand."

"Then if you should succeed in securing the position, you may soon be able to ascertain the cause of Jack's departure from home and the motive, perhaps, of his having been kidnapped by those outlaws, for that there was some outside reason I have no question. Upon this information I will be able to plan my actions in going West to find him."

Leaving the old mansion, the youth escorted his sister to the cottage on the Hudson River where she made her home.

The next morning, bright and early, dressed in a neat and becoming garb, Olive applied at the address given in the advertisement. She found the residence to be an elegant mansion on Madison avenue, and a butler in livery opened the door for her.

Early though it was, a number of applicants had already been there for the position, but so far none had been engaged.

The butler cast an admiring glance at Olive's lovely face, and learning that she, too, had come in answer to the advertisement, said:

"I'll tell Miss Helen you are here."

A moment after, a young and beautiful woman of eighteen swept gracefully into the library where Olive was in waiting.

At a glance she seemed to read Olive through and through and said pleasantly:

"You have come for the position of maid to my mother, I believe."

"I have, miss, and I hope it has not already been filled," answered Olive.

"It has not and you shall have the place."

"But, you have not yet seen my references, miss."

"To me your face is your best reference," sweetly responded Helen Benson.

"Your position will be a tax upon you, for it is that of maid and companion. You will find my mother an invalid and peculiar, but do your best and you can please her, for your pay will be liberal, and your hours not arduous. When can you come?"

"This afternoon if you wish, miss."

"Then come and see my mother."

Olive was conducted up-stairs into a luxuriously furnished room, where upon a lounge reclined a lady of brilliant beauty, and whose youthful appearance caused her to look more like the sister than mother of Helen Benson.

"Mother, this is Olive, and I have engaged her to look after you. I am sure you will like her."

Mrs. Hammond hardly glanced at Olive and replied:

"Her first duty must be to mold herself to my will. Are you content to do that, girl?"

"I am, madam," answered Olive softly.

"Then report to me for duty in time to dress me for dinner to-night."

Olive bowed and left the room, and following her, Helen Benson said:

"Humor my mother's eccentricities; speak only when spoken to, and you will have no trouble."

As Olive was ushered out of the door the butler said:

"I'm betting, miss, your pretty face got you the place."

"Thank you, yes; I have got the place."

"You'll find the missus no angel, Miss, but I'll do all I can to make it pleasant for you."

"Thanks!" dryly returned Olive, and as she descended the steps, she met a stylishly dressed young gentleman ascending them.

With a glance at him, she recognized in him her brother, New York Nat, and said in a whisper:

"There is a skeleton in the closet of this house, Nat."

"Then we must unearth the skeleton, Olive, dear," whispered Nat, as he placed his hand upon the door-bell.

The door was opened promptly by the butler, and asking to see Miss Benson, Nat was shown into the parlor, giving his card, upon which was written the name of "Chandler."

Helen Benson came into the room almost immediately, and greeting her courteously, he said:

"Miss Benson, I believe?"

"Yes, sir; but I fail to recall having met you before."

"We never have met, Miss Benson. I came in response to an advertisement I saw in a Western paper, calling upon one Jack Hammond to return home, or to communicate with Helen Benson at this address, on a matter of life and death."

Helen started, glanced toward the door of the parlor, and at once closed it; then approaching near to Nat, she said:

"I am Helen Benson, and it was I who put that advertisement in the far Western paper. May I ask if you are Jack Hammond? You look years younger than I supposed him to be."

"No; my name is Nat Chandler, Miss Benson."

"Then what interest have you in Jack Hammond?"

"I have met him, and under strange circumstances."

"Do you know where he now is?"

"I do not, but I am going on the search for him. I will inform you under what circumstances we met, and tell you why your advertisement prompts me to find him."

Without a word Helen Benson led to a seat and said simply:

"Tell me."

Then Nat related the story of his meeting with the young miner, "Gentleman Jack," as he was called in the mining country—of the attack on the coach by the road-agents—the attempted kidnapping of Jack, and his rescue of him, and, afterward, of his mysterious disappearance from the little tavern at the railroad station.

"When I saw your advertisement on my way East," continued Nat, "I was convinced that Jack Hammond was kidnapped for

a purpose, and I determined to return West again and find him."

"And was that casual meeting with Mr. Hammond the only cause of the interest you feel in him?"

"May I tell you something in confidence?" asked Nat.

"You certainly can."

"I have a double motive, then: my interest in Jack Hammond, and the fact that I am a detective."

CHAPTER IV.

A GIRL'S CONFESSION.

"A DETECTIVE?" gasped Helen Benson, and she looked positively frightened.

"Yes; but do not be alarmed. I can serve you all the better by being one, and I feel that you need just the kind of aid I can give," said Nat.

"Why do you think so?"

"I will tell you frankly, and then you can decide to trust me or not."

"I confess that I do need some one to help me; you have guessed aright."

"It is not altogether guess-work, for I saw your advertisement in a Western paper, and found that it had not been published East."

"This convinced me that there was some secrecy about it; and, inquiring, I learned that Miss Helen Benson lived in this elegant house with her mother and step-father, both of whom were invalids."

"I also heard that Mr. Hammond, when he married your mother, was a widower with one son—a wild young fellow who was accused of a crime which caused him to run away from home, and no one knew what had become of him, though it was never proven that he was guilty of the deed he had been charged with."

"A notice had appeared in a Western paper of the death, in a duel, of one Jack Hammond, in the mines, and his father seeing this notice, had considered that his son was dead, and he was so regarded by all who had known him."

"This much I learned, and yet, in the face of this belief, I saw your advertisement—not one put in by his own father, for him to return home; and it set me to thinking, especially after my having met him, as I did, and his mysterious disappearance at the little railway station the night following the attempt of the outlaws to kidnap him."

"Under the circumstances, I decided to look him up and learn his fate; but as a preliminary to my work, to call upon you, as per the advertisement I read."

"I am a detective, but I am unknown even to the Secret Service Chief, for I am working for a purpose before I make myself known."

"I am interested in finding what the fate of Jack Hammond has been, and through seeing your advertisement, and now in meeting you, it seems to me that I have been drawn into this case for a good purpose. It rests with you whether I am to have your confidence or not, or shall have to find your step-brother unaided by you."

Helen Benson was silent for full a minute; then she held forth her hand frankly, and said:

"I will trust you."

Then she continued:

"To trust you I must make a confession, or a partial one at least, and some day in the future I may tell you all."

"Especially if I discover it," Nat suggested with a smile.

"No fear of that. A much older detective than you are could not guess the secret I hold," said Helen decidedly.

"Not if I guessed that Jack Hammond has a foe in this house, and that it is a woman? That there is a fortune in question that hangs upon the life or death of your step-brother?"

"Oh, how did you know this?" Helen demanded excitedly.

"Oh, I guessed it," assumed Nat, indifferently.

"Then you are a wonderful detective, young as you are; but, tell me, can you guess more?"

"I will do that when I hear your confession."

"Very well; you shall hear it."

"Let me tell you that there is a foe to Jack Hammond in this house, and it is a woman. Who she is I will not tell you, more than to say that it is not myself."

"I know that."

"How do you know it?"

"No woman plots against the man she wishes to serve. But, continue your story," urged Nat. "It is a woman who is his foe, you admit; therefore she is the one to benefit if Jack Hammond is dead."

"I grant that."

"You know that there is a wrong contemplated against him, and you wish to serve him and thwart the woman?"

"Yes; that is my wish."

"Now, miss: is his father angry with him?"

"No; he certainly is not."

"Will this fortune come to him from his father?"

"No."

"Now to your confession, if you please," enjoined Nat.

"I have nothing now to confess; you have guessed it all," Helen replied.

"One question, then: do you consider this foe of Jack Hammond one to even plot his death to carry out her ends?"

"I do; I am sorry to say."

"Then, if he is not dead, his life is in danger, you believe."

"That is my belief."

"If I find Jack Hammond you wish to see him before others do?"

"I certainly do."

"Have you anything more to say?"

"Yes; I wish to consider you in my service, now, and to give you money to defray all expenses."

"Thank you, I am well supplied with funds, and I never take pay until the case is gained."

"Find Jack Hammond, then, and your reward shall be liberal. Tell him to come East with you, and remain in hiding. Then you must come to me and say where I can see him, and he shall hear the whole story that I have to tell upon certain conditions that I have to demand of him."

"Now tell me where I can reach you by letter, and I will give you an address by which you can communicate with me."

Ten minutes after New York Nat left the elegant home, and, taking the Elevated cars up-town, got off at the station nearest to the cottage where his sister lived.

Olive met him at the door, and the two walked out to their favorite seat upon the bank that overlooked the Hudson.

"Well, sister mine, you got your situation as lady's maid?" said Nat, playfully.

"Yes; I am to serve as lady's maid and girl detective, and I believe that I will fill both positions to the satisfaction of the lady that employs me, and of the chief of the Unknown Boy Police, who sends me there."

"I have no doubt of that," rejoined Nat; "and let me give you a piece of information: "There is a woman in the house plotting against Jack Hammond whom I am going to seek. So, find out who she is, and her motive. In fact, unearth the skeleton in that elegant home, and mail a letter to me of any and every important discovery. Letters to you, I will address to the cottage, here."

That night saw New York Nat, Keno and Freckles flying West upon an Express train to find the missing Jack Hammond.

CHAPTER V.

A RECOGNITION.

NEW YORK NAT knew that he could not return to the little station in company with Freckles and Keno and the three not be recognized as the boy miners who had been the heroes of the stage coach adventure at the time the outlaws attempted to kidnap Jack Hammond, so, consulting with his two pards it was decided that they should say they had come back to again go to mining, hoping to strike it rich.

In this way they could hang about the little settlement for days, and get what information they might pick up about Jack Hammond, and if he had not been heard from they could take the trail to hunt him down.

They reached the border station in the middle of the night, and at once went to the little tavern where they had found quarters before.

The night clerk recognized them, and greeted them pleasantly, giving them the same room, while he asked:

"Goin' ter gold-diggin' ag'in, boys?"

"Yes, pard; we invested what we had, and came West to try it again, so will get an outfit here, and look about for the best place to go."

"Well, I wishes yer luck; but, I guess you is all sleepy, so I'll show you yer room."

"Thank you; we are tired. But, is there any news in the town?"

"Waal, it's a leetle dull jist now, and there has only been four men kilt since you was here. But, hold on! You know that young feller who disappeared that night, the one the road-agents wanted?"

"Yes, I think I recall him."

"Waal, you oughter, young feller. I remembers you was ther gamecock that let in on ther gang and saved him."

"Oh, yes; that man?" said New York Nat, as though just recalling Jack Hammond to mind.

"Yas. Waal, he hain't put in an appearance since, and they do say as his body was found by Fred Fox, the stage driver, lying right in the trail where they held the coach up when you was along, and the passengers buried it."

"He was killed, then, as was feared?"

"Yas, that's about the fact."

"That's a pity! He seemed such a nice young man," said Nat.

"It was a pity, for he was a nice feller—none better. We has his traps here now, which he left in his room the night they called him out."

"You is young to guzzle, but will you take a night-cap fu'st before you goes to roost?" asked the clerk, politely.

"No, thank you; we never drink," replied Nat.

"Take a peep in at the boys, then, before you goes up," and the clerk, Wide Awake Tim, led the way to the door opening into the gambling-saloon.

The three boy pards stood gazing in at the scene with considerable interest—a scene only met with in the Wild West.

Men in top-boots, rough clothing, slouch hats, and armed to the teeth, sat at rude tables, gambling for small or large sums, as their wealth allowed. The air was dense with tobacco-smoke; there was clinking of glasses, loud conversation, mingled with oaths, the rattle of money, and boisterous laughter: all making a drama that a single word might precipitate into a tragedy.

After a few moments Nat and his comrades turned away to their rooms, but the moment the door closed upon them Nat whispered:

"Boys, I have made a discovery!"

"What is it, Pard Nat?" asked Keno, eagerly.

"The day when the coach was held up,

one of the masked road-agents who escaped our fire was strangely marked. His mask did not cover the fact that he had lost an ear, and had beneath that ear a red star in exact shape of a cross. I noticed this in particular—a very singular mark."

"I should say it was singular!" commented Freckles.

"To-night, the man sitting at the right of the door, in the saloon, and gambling heavily, had but one ear, and beneath it that red star of a cross."

"Whew!" whistled Keno.

"That is a great discovery," muttered Freckles; "it means big business, I guess."

"Yes, that is one man to spot," Nat assumed. "We must find out all about him, for he will know the secret of the mysterious disappearance of Gentleman Jack, or I miss my reckoning."

"You bet he will, Pard Nat; and, knowing what we do he can be forced to tell. Oh, it's a rum strike you have made."

"Yes, it is a recognition that will pay us well; so, to begin without delay, I will go down and risk a few dollars on a game to find out who he is."

Nat left the room and descended to the office.

Wide Awake Tim was already fast asleep, and must have been having a bad dream; for he sprung to his feet with a yell, whipped out his revolver, and blazing away killed the Chinee who was just about placing the clerk's midnight supper upon the counter before him.

Down went the Chinee, dishes and all, with a crash, and the noise brought a crowd from the gambling saloon next door.

"Durn if I hain't kilt ther 'Heathen Chinee.' I was havin' a bad dream, and he woke me up sudden, and I tuk him fer the devil, and blazed away."

"Well, if the Devil's dead we hain't got nothing to fear, now; so come back, boys, and finish our game."

The crowd returned to the saloon, leaving the dead Chinaman, and Wide Awake Tim to keep the vigil over the departed.

New York Nat had witnessed all, and advancing to Tim, asked:

"Who was that man who said, 'as the Devil was dead he had nothing more to fear'?"

"'Scar Face Sam,' is what the boys call him behind his back, but several who has did it lies with thar toes tanned up to the daisies; so, don't you go and make no mistake, young feller, but call him Satan Sam, for that fits him, too," and Wide Awake Tim gathered what of his supper remained on the floor, paying no heed to the dead body, for "John" was only a "Heathen Chinee."

But Nat was more humane. He raised the body to a bench, folded the arms across the breast, and then, turning to Tim, remarked:

"I thought I had seen Satan Sam in the mines when I was out here before."

"I guesses you has, for he strikes many trails, and goes about looking for gold and for trouble, and between you and me, I wish he'd meet his match, for he is the baddest kind, as you'll find out if you stays here long," and Tim, having rescued part of his supper, calmly sat down to eat it.

The New York Shadower had heard enough to prove that Satan Sam was not a stranger in the settlement, and he returned to his room, assured that this "baddest" man was his game.

CHAPTER VI.

SHADOWING SATAN.

WHEN the three pards of the Boy Ferret band descended to breakfast the next morning they found the landlord himself on duty in the office. He was jokingly telling some of the men how Wide Awake Tim had gone to sleep and had the nightmare just as Pig-tail Johnny, the Chinaman, had brought

him his supper, and was shot by the clerk for the devil.

The landlord greeted the boy miners pleasantly, and when they had had their breakfast they walked out on the street to have a talk, for in a board hotel, where every word could be heard from room to room, they had not dared to speak aloud. Their young chief had something of importance to communicate to his two companions.

Having strolled leisurely through the settlement they sought a secluded spot and then Nat proceeded to discourse.

"Well, boys, we are on the right track, and if we do not find Gentleman Jack we will find out who kidnapped him and if he really was murdered, as reported."

"You bet we will, Pard Nat," Keno assured, while Freckles asked:

"What's the first play, cap'n?"

"Well, we came here as boy miners, and we are to begin to look about for an outfit. While doing that, we can shadow this Satan Sam, Scar-Face Sam, or whatever else he may call himself."

"We will take our time, work slowly, and get all the information we can as to Satan Sam's habits, who are his associates, and just what he is up to."

"I will try and be friendly with him, because in some way we have got to trap him. He is the wolf we want."

"We can do it, Pard Nat," Keno assured, confidently.

"You bet we can," added Freckles.

"Now, as he was one of those road agents beyond all doubt, he has pals who must be spotted, and once we discover who those pals are we can act. It would be strange if one of them could not be persuaded to tell what he knows from fear of death or for a lively bribe."

After discovering the situation further the three pards tramped about the settlement, visiting the stores, the camps and corrals where the horse-traders kept their stock.

They went to see the west-bound and east-bound trains pass through, and, not wishing to attract attention by dressing in Eastern garb, they had rigged themselves out in the regulation frontier toggery.

They looked quite picturesque in their top-boots, broad slouch hats, blue flannel shirts and belt of arms, but avoided putting on airs, as they knew they would be very quickly "called down" or have to fight.

The Chinee killed by Wide Awake Tim was buried decently at the expense of the landlord, and the coroner's jury decided very quickly that it was a case of "justifiable homicide," as the Celestial should have known better than wake a man up when he was having a bad dream.

The boy pards attended the funeral, and then discovered an ugly feeling among the half a hundred Chinamen who were there.

Wide Awake Tim was on hand as chief mourner, and had to explain again and again how it happened, his recital causing much amusement.

The young Easterners felt sorry for the unfortunate Chinaman and looked on with serious faces.

They remembered that he was far from his native land, that he had a mother, and kindred to love him, and that he had been shot down, though not with intent to kill, without a pang of remorse or regret.

So they strolled over on the hillside and gathered some wild flowers and placed them upon the humble grave, little dreaming that the act was seen by two Chinamen, who seeing them approach, had hidden in the bushes near by.

Beholding this act of kindness to the dead, the two hiders stepped from their place of concealment and timidly approaching the trio of Ferrets one of them said:

"'Melican young man put flowee upon Chinaman's grave?'

"Yes, for we felt very sorry for him, far

away from his home and people," was answered by Nat.

"Goodee young man! Wing Lung likee him, for it is his bruddee who is dead, and Loo Choo here is cousin—my cousin, too. Me much likee goodee young 'Melican man."

The Chinaman held forth his hand and New York Nat and his comrades shook hands with him and his companion, who remarked in a significant way:

"Satan Samee bad man; him die some day."

"Yes, we saw his act," said New York Nat, alluding to the fact that Satan Sam had fired his revolver six times down into the newly-made grave, brutally remarking that it would scare the Heathen Chinee and hasten him on the trail to the Devil—which remark caused a general laugh.

Finding out that Wing Lung was also a waiter in the tavern, and that Loo Choo worked in the gambling saloon, the ferrets retraced their way to Junction City, as the settlement was called, and at once set about their work.

The human wolf had hunters on his track!

CHAPTER VII.

NAT PLAYS TWO GAMES AT ONCE.

"I'm only a boy, sir, but I'd like to play a game with you, if only to learn, for I like your way of handling cards. Don't think I'm broke, sir, for I've got money to pay if I lose."

No one could take offense at the words and manner of New York Nat, and Satan Sam, whom he addressed so politely, did not.

He only saw a pigeon to pluck. He cared nothing for the youth or condition of any one he played with, so that he could get his money.

He had seen the young fellows about the tavern for some days and had his eye upon them. Whether he had seen them before, upon a certain tragic hold-up of a stage coach, he kept to himself.

Now that one of the youthful trio appeared to want to get acquainted, he was willing; so he replied as graciously as one of his rough nature could:

"So, yer wants ter have me larn yer ter play, kid?"

"Yes, sir, for I like the way you handle cards."

"Now, most men don't like it; but then, you is young. Yes, I can larn yer, and I'll give yer a square game, though if yer loses yer dust don't play ther baby act on me, or I'll hev ter spank yer."

"I won't cry, sir," assured Nat, with a laugh, and he sat down to the table to begin a game with a man of whom everybody in the settlement stood in awe.

"Well, how high kin yer go, kid?" asked Satan Sam, "for I don't play no nickel game, you understand."

"I've got some hundred, sir," innocently replied Nat, and he showed his roll of bills.

The desperado's eyes glittered and the game was begun.

To the surprise of all Nat won, deliberately raising his bet, until Satan Sam, unable to bluff him, threw down his cards, a good hand, at which the young Ferret revealed four aces.

A perfect yell went up from the crowd of on-lookers, but it was checked at the savage oath uttered by Sam, and by his crowd, as he glanced around.

The second game was also won by the young New Yorker, and the third went his way, too!

"I say, kid," growled the bad man, "you wanted me to larn you and you is larnin me—see?"

"If it keeps up I guesses you is a clear cut sharp, young as you be," and the desperado shoved the winnings of New York Nat over to him with a very bad grace.

"I am no sharp, no cheat; I simply have won because luck has been my way in holding the best cards," quietly answered Nat, and another game was begun.

This time the boy player ran the bet up to one hundred dollars, and the desperado won on four aces.

Nat coolly took the balance of the pack from the table and handing it to a miner said:

"Run over those cards, please, and see if there are any aces among them."

Amid breathless silence the miner called out:

"Here is ther ace o' diamonds and ther ace o' hearts."

"I asked you to teach me, not cheat me. Give me my money back again, for these two men at your back there slipped those cards into the top of your shirt!" and Nat's revolver covered Satan Sam with a quickness that surprised all.

Every eye was upon Sam, and he burst forth into a loud laugh and threw the money down on the table, while he said, with no show of anger:

"You is right, kid; I did slip in the keerds on yer as a joke—me and my pards, Buck-eye and Slouch, playin' it on yer jist ter see if yer was sharp enough to git onter us."

"You've won yer money squar'; nor I wouldn't hev tuk yer dust in 'arnest, but was only l'arnin' yer how easy yer c'u'd be cheated, and you was onter me clean through."

"Never play with keerds as has backs like other packs that kin be bought near by; that's gambler gospel."

"But you'll do, and I likes you, and we'll be friends, for I don't begrudge you ther two hundred and fifty you has won from me—you bet I don't!" and Sam of the Scarred Face held out his hand, which was warmly grasped by Nat, who answered:

"I didn't think you intended to cheat me, but I saw those gentlemen slip the cards down your shirt collar, as they leaned on your shoulder, and you got the money out of your breast pocket and the aces at the same time."

"Well, you is a keen kid, and will do. You is quick on the draw, too, and I has heerd you kin shoot to kill, for you is the boy dandy that give ther road-agents a scare some time ago, they tells me."

"Yer must go under my teachin' and you'll l'arn border ways."

"Thank you, Mr. Sam, but we are going to start for the mines to-morrow, or next day, for we have bought our horses and outfit, and are going gold-hunting again."

"I'm downright sorry to lose yer, for yer promises well fer a kid."

"Well, I'll see yer ag'in—so-long!" and Satan Sam turned to another game of cards, while New York Nat left the saloon and went up to his room.

Two hours later he was joined there by Keno and Freckles, and shortly after midnight Wing Lung, the Chinaman, crept softly into their room, and made a motion for New York Nat, which the latter seemed to understand, as the Chinee departed at once, without uttering a word.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PIGTAIL DETECTIVE.

WING LUNG, the Chinaman, left his hotel through the kitchen door, for he did not wish to attract the attention of Wide Awake Tim by passing out through the office. Since Wing Lung's brother had been shot by the night-clerk in his sleep, the Chinaman had been very cautious about arousing the night-clerk from his slumbers. Leaving the building, Wing Lung glided away in the darkness like a night shadow.

He sought a group of trees upon a little rise, and going from tree to tree, to be sure that there was no one else there, he sat down upon the grass as though to await the coming up of some one.

In a short while a form appeared through the darkness.

The Chinaman arose and peered cautiously, as though both with fear and hope, but soon muttered:

"Him allee right?"

It was New York Nat. He approached the trees as though prepared to meet friend or foe.

"Well, Wing Lung, here I am!" he announced, in suppressed voice.

"Me too, allee same!" was the Chinaman's reply.

"You have news for me?" asked Nat.

"Mucheet news."

"Well, out with it!"

"Satan Samee he win muchee monee; then he go home with three badee 'Melican men; Wing Lung he bidee in shed and hear talkee; Satan Samee say—boy pards go on trail to morrow—have much monee; so they catchee boys at Canyon Spring, where they camp allee night; then Satan Samee killee boys, gettee horses, guns and monee, scalpie boys, makee believe Injun kill 'em."

"That is good! said Nat. Wing Lung, you are a dandy detective. Did you hear Satan Sam say whether they would lie in wait for us, or attack us when in camp?"

"Satan Samee say he shootee you when asleep!" answered the Chinaman.

"If he catches us asleep he may shoot, but you had better hurry back now, Wing Lung, as Wide Awake Tim will have finished his supper and be calling for you. I will manage to call you again before I go."

Nat warmly grasped the hand of the Chinaman, who then glided away back to the hotel, while New York Nat's thoughts ran:

"That Chinaman will make an invaluable detective. He is slyer than a mink, and shrewd as the fabled serpent. His cousin, Loo Choo, too! They'd make a famous record, I am sure. I must contrive in some way to take them back to New York with me, and make them members of the Boy Police Band.

"But now, to return and tell my comrades of the dead fall game Satan Sam has set for us. Our little act of sympathy in putting flowers upon his dead brother's grave has made the Celestial our friend until the end."

With this New York Nat returned to the hotel, and found Wide Awake Tim, the night clerk, cursing the Chinaman for bringing him a supper which, he said, was not fit for a dog. Anxious to save Wing Lung from further trouble, Nat approached the clerk and began to talk to him, the Chinaman seizing the waiter and quickly making his escape out of the office.

Unhaunted by the death of the Chinaman he had shot, without one pang of regret for his deed, Wide Awake Tim had lighted his pipe and comfortably seated himself for a smoke until the Midnight Express should come in.

Glad of New York Nat's company, the clerk began to joke with him regarding the very clever defeat of Satan Sam at the game of cards they had played.

"I tell yer, young chap, you're a Daisy from Wayback, for I seen the game."

"Satan Sam played yer for a tenderfoot jist out o' the cradle, and you called him down in great shape."

"I say, whar did you l'arn to draw a gun, for you is quicker than greased lightning? Sam he had to take the bluff, and it were amoosin' ter see him crawl, but he wilted and got out o' the game without being entirely downed. Pard, you is goin' to be a gilt-edged sport."

"Thank you," dryly responded New York Nat; and the night clerk having brought up the subject of Satan Sam, the young Ferret appeared to be deeply interested in the desperado's history, so he asked many questions about the tough and his following.

The information gleaned was of much benefit to New York Nat, for he learned that Satan Sam certainly deserved his name, and his following of half a dozen men of the same stripe formed a clique in Junction City that terrorized the community, though, outside of committing murder, they had never been caught in any lawless acts.

Bidding Wide Awake Tim good-night, Nat started along the dimly-lighted hallway, on his return to his room, when suddenly he heard his name spoken in a whisper. Turning quickly, he beheld Wing Lung, who whispered:

"Satan Sam lookee through window and hear allee Tim talkee about him. He muchee bad man!" and the Chinaman disappeared without another word.

"I believe that Satan Sam really suspects me of watching him and of being other than I represent myself; but I shall down him yet," and the young Ferret disappeared through the door of his room, where his comrades anxiously waited his coming, not yet having retired to rest, in their anxiety.

CHAPTER IX.

A GRAVE'S SECRET.

New York Nat and his two comrades left Junction City after dinner, determined to take the advice of men who knew, to ride as far as Canyon Spring and there make their first camp.

They had been told to follow the pony trail instead of winding along on the stage trail, as the former would cut off for them fully a dozen miles.

But, for some reason best known to himself, New York Nat did not cut off distance by the pony trail: rather, he stuck to the broader one of the stage coach.

They pushed rapidly on, and it was not long before they came to the scene of the road-agent attack on the coach, as told in the first chapter of this story.

Here Nat halted, the three Ferrets dismounted, and, taking from their pack-horse a pick, spade and shovel, they looked about until they discovered a grave, evidently dug only a few weeks before, for the ground was yet fresh.

Setting to work, they rapidly threw out the earth, Nat remarking:

"Now we will know, boys, if Gentleman Jack was really killed by the road-agents and lies in this grave, as is reported in Junction City to be the case."

"If he is, Pard Nat?"

"Well, Keno, that will end our search for him and our duty will be to then report that he was murdered, where his body can be found, and then hunt down his murderers."

"But, how will we know if it is Gentleman Jack, Pard Nat?" asked Freckles.

"Yes, those who seemed to know him in Junction City, reported that it was his body found here on the stage-trail; and, in fact, the miner who was along the day we were held up said so, and he was his pard," Keno remarked, "so I don't see how there can be any doubt."

"I know all that, boys," answered Nat, digging away at the soil; "but that miner may or may not have been his pard, and it may have been to his benefit, for some reason, for Gentleman Jack to be thought dead. Perhaps the poor fellow is so; that we will now find out. But, that miner who was with Jack, that day, I am sure is none other than one of Satan Sam's pards, and if so, then he had a motive in saying Gentleman Jack was dead—ah! we are getting near to the body," and the boys dug more carefully.

"How will you know the body, Pard Nat?" asked Keno as they came to the blanket-enveloped form lying at the bottom of the grave.

"When I went into Gentleman Jack's room at the hotel he was changing his clothes, and I noticed on his left arm a crest

pricked in with India ink, and he has not been so long dead but that it will still be visible—ah, here we are!"

They did not raise the body from the grave, for they were in a hurry to press on to their camping-place, but, cutting a slit in the blanket, the face and form were revealed.

"It is a young man, and does look like Gentleman Jack; but we will soon know," and New York Nat raised the muscular left arm, bared it by rolling up the sleeve and, in a chorus, the three Ferrets exclaimed:

"It is not Gentleman Jack."

The flesh was becoming blackened with decomposition, but there was no mark upon it of the crest Nat had seen on the arm of the young miner.

Then, too, though the face resembled Gentleman Jack's, in a striking degree, New York Nat's keen eye detected that the features were cast in a coarser mold: the hair was a shade darker; and particularly he noticed that the hands and feet were large and ill-shaped, when he had remarked that those of Jack Hammond were small and shapely.

"Boys, this is not the man we are looking for, and to find him we must ask Satan Sam."

"Will he tell?" Freckles asked.

"A bird that can sing but won't sing must he made to sing," was Nat's significant response.

The three then rapidly filled in the grave, cast some leaves over it, and mounting their horses rode on rapidly toward Canyon Spring.

The sun was yet half an hour high when they rode into the canyon.

It was wooded, and a large spring flowed from under the cliff several hundred yards off the trail.

There was the appearance of many having camped there before, but no one very lately.

The New York delegates staked their ponies out, unpacked their traps from the pack-saddle, cooked a good supper and then spread their blankets.

They seemed to pay no heed to the warning given New York Nat by Wing Lung, the Chinaman, or to have forgotten it, for they evidently intended to camp there for the night, and had placed no guard, for all three sat around the camp-fire as the shadows of the night began to cast the canyon in gloom.

At last darkness fell upon the scene; the camp-fire flickered low, though one log burned on, the blaze dying out now and then to again spring up and brighten up the scene.

Once it seemed as though it would not burn up again, but at last it did, and by its light it was seen that the young Ferrets had retired to their blankets.

Its light also revealed three dark forms creeping toward the little camp!

CHAPTER X.

THE FAIR FERRET.

OLIVE, the Mascot Queen of the Boy Police, went to her position in the Hammond mansion as lady's maid and companion ostensibly, but in reality as a spy and detective.

The talk she had had with her brother, New York Nat, before his departure, gave her full knowledge of the secret service she was to perform, and she understood just what his impression had been of Helen Benson and the others in the household from what he had said of them.

He had told Olive to keep her eye upon Mrs. Hammond, Helen Benson and the servants one and all, using the butler to glean all information he might possess regarding the family history.

Olive was a born detective, she had an innocent manner and look about her that would prevent her coming under suspicion; so when she went to her post she was determined to discover all she could and show Nat and the

members of the Ferret band that she, too, could do clever Secret Service work.

In fact, she had shown her cleverness in keeping her identity, as Nat's sister, hidden from the entire band over which she ruled as queen.

Olive's first duty upon entering the mansion was to win favor with all.

Of course she was eyed curiously by the other servants in the house, of whom there were half a dozen.

Her sweet ways at once won the esteem of the cook, her assistant, and the house-girls, for she already had captivated the butler, Sykes.

Mrs. Hammond regarded her in a way that would have embarrassed any one else than Olive.

The mistress of the mansion seemed to be trying to read her thoroughly, and began in a way that was meant to show her that hers was the will that ruled the Hammond mansion.

Olive was all willingness and sweetness toward Mrs. Hammond, and before she had been in the house three days she saw that Mrs. Hammond trusted her implicitly, that the servants all liked her, that the butler might be regarded in the light of a lover already, and Miss Benson seemed also inclined to take to her.

Why she had been told by Nat to keep an eye especially upon Helen Benson, she could not understand, for the young lady appeared to Olive to be all that was lovely in character.

But, the sister knew her brother's wonderful powers of reading human nature, and she said to herself:

"If Nat told me to watch Miss Benson he has some good reason for it, and I will not allow my liking for her to prevent my doing my duty."

Once only had Olive seen Mr. Hammond. His rooms were in a rear wing of the mansion, on the second floor, overlooking a small yard, and with a fashionable church beyond, so that they were removed from the street and very quiet.

He had there his library and his sitting-room combined, his bed-room and toilet room, so that he lived apart quite to himself.

Olive was sent to the rooms with some medicine for the master, and found him reclining in bed, glancing over the morning papers.

The doctor had made his daily call, reported the patient improving, prescribed another medicine, and this it was that Olive carried to him.

She saw a man of fine physique with a face strangely handsome and stamped with strong and noble character.

"Ah, miss, I beg pardon—can you be one of Helen's friends whom I fail to recognize?" said Mr. Hammond in his courtly way.

"Oh no, sir; I am only the new girl, sir, Olive—Mrs. Hammond's maid, and I was sent with your medicine, sir."

"You are very kind, but you are one who should not hold a menial position, and—"

"But, sir, necessity knows no law. Shall I give you your medicine, sir?"

"I suppose so, though really I cannot see that the doctor is doing me any good. I seem chained to this bed, unable to shake off the feeling of numbness that is upon me."

"I will give father his medicine, Olive," and Helen Benson glided softly into the room and took the glass and spoon from Olive, while she whispered:

"You need not tell my mother that you did not give the medicine, or that I was here."

"Yes, miss; I understand."

Olive left the room and returning to Mrs. Hammond was asked:

"How does Mr. Hammond seem?"

"This is the first time I have seen him, madam, so can hardly tell."

"I am getting more and more anxious

about him, for he does not appear to improve; but I hope this newly prescribed medicine will help him," said Mrs. Hammond sadly.

"I hope so, madam, for it must be terrible to be ill."

"Yes; but get one of those novels from the table, they are the latest, and read me one, for I wish to be interested."

Olive did as she was told and while looking over the novels murmured:

"Yes, there is a skeleton in this house, and some one is guilty of wrong, but, what is the wrong and who is the sinner?"

"Well, as Nat said the skeleton must be unearthed."

CHAPTER XI.

OLIVE'S LETTER.

OLIVE had been a couple of weeks in her position when she went to her home one afternoon and received a letter from Nat.

It was written from Junction City, and in it the young Ferret told her that he and his two comrades were gleaned information that would be valuable to them. That they were preparing to start to the mines, but only as a blind, as they would return to Junction City after they had discovered what their going would discover for them.

"We expect," the letter went on to say, "that our start will make certain men we suspect show their hands; in fact, they are not the men to allow us to get to the mines if they can prevent it, and they are just the ones we believe can give us the information we wish about the fate of Jack Hammond, so expect to have another letter before long with real news in it, sis."

The letter was written in a cipher known only to Nat and Olive, and when she had figured it out, she sat down to write to Nat.

His letter told her that they were about to start upon a pretended expedition, which would be no more than a trap in which to catch those whom he suspected of having knowledge of Gentleman Jack.

This caused Olive considerable uneasiness, as she knew that Nat's experience with frontier crooks was limited; but then she argued that her brother always found a way of getting out of a tight place, and also of winning any game of daring he entered upon.

So Olive determined to dismiss dread of evil to Nat from her mind, and at once wrote to him of what had taken place in the band, and how she had done her duty as a girl ferret.

After telling him of all minor matters, she wrote, and in cipher as he had done:

"Now, Nat, let me speak of my work here, and what I have discovered in my duty as lady's maid to Mrs. Hammond."

"Let me first enter into the history of the family I am living with."

"After being here three days I saw Mr. Hammond, who is an invalid."

"He is a man of fine physique, seemingly possesses a strong constitution, but is suffering from a disease which baffles his physician's skill, or at least he gets no better."

"The disease confines him to his rooms, as he suffers from what is at times a partial paralysis, being unable to command the use of the muscles of his limbs."

"He is a courtly, genial gentleman, and I am sure that he has some cross to bear."

"He married when very young the mother of the one you know as Gentleman Jack, and it was when dying that Mrs. Hammond made the strange will leaving her wealth, for she was heiress with a large fortune, to her son, John Hammond."

"The will further read that in case of Jack Hammond's death it was to go to his father, who however had a large fortune of his own."

"The riches left by Mrs. Hammond increased rapidly, and before Jack Hammond

was of age it was quoted at a million, while since then it has nearly doubled that amount.

"Jack Hammond's inheritance from his mother is all in the keeping of his father, so the wife had no wish to slight her husband in leaving it to her son."

"I am thus particular in stating this condition of affairs as to property, to see if you can discover any clue in it for certain happenings here."

"Jack Hammond left here for two reasons, one being that he got into an affair where he was forced to take life, and which was at first regarded as a murder, but afterward was proven to be a clear case of self-defense."

"Leaving as he did, under bad advice, to escape the supposed consequences of the crime he was charged with, it was then discovered that a forgery had been committed for quite a large sum, and this was traced to him, but simply through the charge of guilt being put upon him by persons who were under suspicion."

"Enough transpired soon after to show that Jack Hammond, if guilty, was not alone in his guilt, and his father tried to find him and urge his coming home to clear his name of dishonor."

"But the attempt to find young Mr. Hammond was useless, and then it was that his father gave it up and married the lady who is now his wife."

"She claims to be thirty-five years of age, but I do not believe that she is thirty, nor do I believe that Miss Benson can be her daughter, as she is all of eighteen."

"Mr. Hammond is certainly devoted to his beautiful wife and equally beautiful step-daughter, and they are untiring in their devotion to him, yet I feel that there is something wrong somewhere, and either Mrs. Hammond is a wicked woman or her alleged step-daughter is, and which one is, or if both, I am determined to find out."

"But now as to what has aroused my suspicions, Nat," and the letter went on to state what it was, and which the next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HIDDEN HAND.

"There is a Hidden Hand here in this house that is doing evil, but whose hand it is I am not able yet to find out," Olive's letter went on to say.

"Mr. Hammond takes certain medicine three times daily, and it is always prepared for him by Mrs. Hammond, who keeps the bottles under lock and key in her room."

"She, Mrs. Hammond, mixes the medicines and I take them to her husband after breakfast, lunch and dinner each day."

"Almost invariably Miss Benson meets me in her step-father's room, takes the glasses from me and says that she will give it to the patient, but she has never done so while I remain in the room, and if I linger too long she sends me away with some excuse, as though anxious to get rid of me."

"This looks suspicious, Nat, on her part, but what adds to it is that she always whispers to me not to let her mother know that she was in the room."

"Again, when once or twice I have taken the medicine sooner than usual, or later, and have given it to the invalid myself, Miss Benson has seemed really agitated, but I cannot find it in my heart to suspect her of evil, she is so young, beautiful and good."

"Nor can I suspect Mrs. Hammond, as she is also so lovely in character, and her kindness to me I can never forget."

"Already she has raised my wages, and though I have not wanted to take them, she has made me a number of presents of dresses and odd things, just as good as new."

"Of course I use none of them, but keep them in case they may be wanted in the future."

"When Miss Benson speaks most kindly

of her step-brother, and hopes for his return home, telling me that he has been sinned against rather than sinned, her mother says almost the same thing about him, and longs for his coming, yet dreads that he may really be dead.

"Thus it stands between the two, but are both innocent, or both guilty, or if one is guilty of wrong-doing, which one of these two lovely women is it?

"I leave this for your more experienced head to decide, though of course I will still keep up my watching and waiting for a glimpse of the closet skeleton and the mysterious Hidden Hand.

"The servants have all been in the family for some time, and are devoted to the master, Mrs. Hammond and Miss Benson, while the two who knew Jack Hammond speak of him as a noble youth.

"In their minds there is not the shadow of a suspicion against the mother and daughter, that they are plotting against Mr. Hammond, or that one of them is doing so.

"In my mind the only suspicious circumstances against one of them, or both, is the strange behavior of the mother and daughter about the medicines for Mr. Hammond.

"A peculiar feature also is that before my coming, there have been no less than five women holding my position discharged after a short stay.

"Two of them were discharged by Miss Benson, during her mother's temporary absence from the house, the others by Mrs. Hammond.

"Another feature is that neither Mrs. Hammond or her daughter ever see the doctor.

"Now the question arises, Nat, what have these women to gain individually or together by an evil deed, and just what is that deed to be?

"Miss Benson's advertising recently for Jack Hammond's return, and having you go in search of him, may be both for and against her.

"If Jack Hammond should be dead his father gets his property, but already is a rich man himself.

"If Mr. Hammond, senior, should die, then Mrs. Hammond will get all of his fortune, and that of his son, saying that Jack is dead.

"But she is said to have been a rich woman when Mr. Hammond married her.

"He is a fine man, one any woman would respect and love, so she cannot wish to get rid of him, unless there is another man in the case.

"If Miss Benson is her daughter, as she claims, then she will naturally be her heir, and between these two there appears to exist the deepest affection.

"If Mr. Hammond dies it is said that he has willed his son's fortune to Miss Benson, but should the son turn up, then she is to share half of his own estate with her mother.

"Miss Benson has many admirers, but admits none on the footing of an accepted lover.

"Is there really some one who is making her the victim of his plot for gain?

"Thus the matter stands for you to ponder over and give me a hint to guide me.

"An amusing feature of my stay here is that the butler is in love with me, and I can do no more under the circumstances than to accept his attentions while here.

"I will write you regularly, and hope you will keep me informed.

"Ever your loving
"SISTER."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIDNIGHT ASSASSINS.

SPRING CANYON, through which the stage-trail wound, from Junction City to the mining country, was a narrow pass at both

entrance and exit, and in the center opened into a valley almost.

It was here that the spring and camping-ground were, for the water was clear and cool, there was plenty of wood and grass, and the pine timber and huge rocks protected campers from the icy winds that swept through the canyon nine months in the year.

The three Boy Ferrets had staked their horses out on a grassy plot in sight of their camp—had built their fire in a sheltered nook and spread their blankets within the radius of its light.

The camp was as still as death, the fire flickered low, and the forms enveloped in the blankets were seen when the burning embers brightened up into a flame now and then.

The four ponies had ceased clipping grass and were lying down to rest, and no sound broke the silence of night save the whine of a coyote impatient for the morning to come so that the campers would go and leave the pickings of the camp to him and his gaunt comrades.

But if all was silent in the camp, moving toward it, as cautiously as Indians, were three forms.

They had crept in through the pass side by side, in a way that showed that they expected to find campers there at the spring.

Side by side they had kept along the trail, reached the pine thicket and then halted to take an observation.

The glare of the camp fire was visible, and they saw apart the three saddle and pack-ponies.

Then they did not disturb the four ponies, for it were their riders they were after then.

The three men carried rifles, and they crept nearer and nearer to the little camp.

At last they gained the edge of the pines, and was within fifty feet of the camp.

As though to aid them the fire sprung into flame just then, and the three blanket-wrapped forms were revealed.

"I'll take the right, you the center one, and you the one on the left, whispered one of the three men.

The other two nodded as they understood the instructions.

After a moment, as though to steady their nerves, the same one who had before spoken whispered:

"Now be ready.

"Fire at their word, and, should any shot fail to kill, fire again upon the one who springs to his feet.

"There must be no mistake, for that trio is dangerous, if they are boys, and to miss any one of them may mean your death or mine, pard."

"We know it," said one.

"We haven't got no excuse for missing," the other remarked.

A moment of waiting and there came the sternly spoken command from the leader:

"Fire!"

The three rifles flashed together, and but for the sharp reports the dull sound of the bullets would have been heard.

"Dead center shots all of 'em, for that isn't a kick," cried the leader.

"Now fer a few hundreds in money and a good outfit to sell in their mines," another remarked, while the third cried:

"Let us see what we has got and git out of this quick, for this are a trail that is trailedd pretty frequent."

The others seemed to recognize the truth of this warning, so the three stepped quickly toward the silent forms in their blankets, one of the men throwing an armful of wood upon the fire which made it blaze up brightly.

As they neared the prostrate forms, being within a few feet of them, suddenly, from a group of rocks just beyond, rung out sharp, clear and threatening from one who was not visible:

"Hands up, all of you, for you are covered!"

There were yells of alarm and a bounding to cover in spite of the command; but a shot rung out, then another and another.

One of the assassins fell dead in his tracks, at which a second turned, and holding his hands high above his head, cried out pleadingly:

"I surrender! don't kill me!"

The third bounded away in the pines, and, a moment after, the clatter of hoofs was heard as he dashed down the canyon, followed by a command to halt, then several rapid shots and a shout.

But the clatter of hoofs was still heard, so it was hard to tell the result of the firing.

At the camp, however, the man that had fallen at the fire from ambush lay as still as death, and the one who had cried for mercy stood as he had halted, his hands raised above his head, while the firelight fell upon him.

But those in ambush had not yet appeared, and the assassin was becoming mystified and more and more alarmed each moment of suspense that he suffered.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAPTIVE.

WHEN the firing down the canyon had spent its echoes, and the clatter of hoofs had ceased, there was heard a shot in the distance, followed by the words:

"I am O. K., Pard Nat, but he got away!"

Then from the other pass came the words:

"All right here, Pard Nat!"

At this, from the group of rocks was heard:

"Ay, ay, pard. Come into camp!"

It was New York Nat who spoke, and, a moment after, he stepped out from the rocks in full view of the one who had so quickly surrendered, and still stood with hands elevated.

"Well, pard, it was a clever game to kill us that Satan Sam planned, but we can plot, too, and your bullets only cut into dummy forms."

"I am sorry Satan Sam escaped, though."

"So am I, for he was the one who ought to have been caught, or be in the place of my pard there."

"Don't be alarmed, for his day will come, and I guess that it will be at a rope end that he will shuffle out of life."

"Put your hands behind you and clasp them."

"Mind you, I'll pull trigger if you make a move to resist or escape."

"I'm not goin' ter throw away my life," sullenly said the man, and he placed his hands behind his back, and instantly Nat clasped a pair of slender steel manacles upon them.

"Now sit down there," and as the man obeyed Nat threw a lariat about him and made him fast to a tree.

Just then Keno came up to the fire, leading three horses already saddled and bridled.

"Here are their horses, Pard Nat."

"The fellow who skipped went by like the wind and threw himself upon the other side of my pony, for he got mine, and returned my fire."

"I saw them leave their horses just outside of the pass, so I pressed him so hard he did not have time to get one, and so kept on in flight, riding my pony bareback."

"It was Satan Sam, Keno, that got away, but there lies one of the trio, dead; here is the third," said Nat.

"Good! but where is Freckles?"

"Here to speak for himself," and Freckles appeared from the upper pass, and added:

"But I wasn't in it even a little bit, pards."

"You did your share, Freckles, and

guarded one of the passes, and it was just accident that you missed the fight.

"But let us bury that dead man there and prepare to get out of this before daylight, as the coach comes along early, you know, and we do not wish to be seen by Fred Fox."

"If you hain't anxious to be seen, my advice, so far as it goes, is for yer not ter plant my dead pard here, for his grave will be seen, he'll be dug up, recognized, and they'll take your trail to see who did the business; see?" and the man's words and manner at once convinced Nat that he was right.

So he replied:

"All right, I'll take your advice, for we do not care to be followed."

"We will carry the body along with us and bury it later on the trail."

"I can show you where you can hide it away, and let me tell you right here, and I am working now to serve you—"

"For your own good?" said Nat dryly.

"In course I am, for I hain't no fool ter serve yer for nothin', stranger as yer be ter me, though I admits we has got quite well acquainted in the last half-hour."

"Well, what were you going to say?"

That Satan Sam got away, and if one of the young feller's shots didn't plug him, he knows you has got me and my pard thar, and he'll be hot on yer trail ter rescue us, not knowing Buster is dead, yer see.

"Now I has seen enough o' you ter know yer hain't ter be caught asleep, and I just kinder feels that he can't rescue me so easy as I kin help myself, seeing as Buster is dead and I've got irons on, so I wants to work out my own salvation by what I has ter say and kin do to help you."

"You have a very level head, pard, and your good health, yes your sudden death, will depend altogether upon what you can do for yourself."

"It is now nearly daylight, and by the time it is dawn we will be ready to travel, so we will get ready now."

This was decided upon, and the dead body was wrapped in a blanket and strapped securely upon the back of one of the ponies.

The prisoner was next tied to the saddle of his own horse, and Keno had to take one of the animals of the assassins, as his own pony had been taken by Satan Sam.

Camp was then broken up and just at day-break the Boy Ferrets with their captive and the dead body moved out of the canyon and continued on the trail toward the mines.

CHAPTER XV.

FOR HIS LIFE.

THE three Boy Ferrets, so fearlessly playing a desperate game with death out in the Wild West, though regretting the escape of the leader of the outlaws, as they now were sure that Satan Sam was, congratulated themselves upon the success they had gained in the capture of one of the murderous trio, and the death of another of them.

They were convinced that the desire of their prisoner to save his own life would cause him to betray his comrades, and yet there was some doubt in Nat's mind as to whether he could tell all they wished to know.

The first thing to be done, New York Nat well knew, was to get rid of the dead body; then seek a hiding place for themselves and then find out just what the prisoner did know of Jack Hammond's being dead or alive.

So he said to the man, "See here, pard, if you push on to where we can hide this body, and then find us a safe retreat."

"Come, there is no time to lose, for Satan Sam is free and I do not intend he shall have time to circumvent us."

"I'm working for you, pards, for I has all to gain by it," was the answer.

"I shall soon know just how much you

regard your own life, for we are not to be trifled with, I'll assure you," was the determined reply of the young Ferret leader.

The prisoner rode on in silence and did lead them to a creek into which he turned so as to hide their trail.

Nat however noticed that he turned up the stream when his idea was that he should have gone down it; but he made no comment.

After an hour in following up the stream the outlaw came to a place where they could turn out and their tracks not be seen.

The outlaw led the way, and they went on for half an hour over a perfectly trackless plain, and then he halted and said:

"Now plant my dead pard here, or if you wish, chuck his body over that cliff and the stream sixty feet below will soon carry him out o' sight."

"No, we will not be inhuman, so will bury him."

This they did, and then they had an early dinner, and mounting once more New York Nat said:

"Now lead the way to a safe retreat, where we can hide from any pursuit of Satan Sam, and as soon as we are in a spot where we do not dread being found, we will talk business to you."

"I'm just the man to lead you right, and to talk business too, pards," was the reply, and the prisoner led on once more, New York Nat whispering to his two Ferret pards:

"Watch every step of the trail, for that man is going to play us false if we do not prevent him."

Both Keno and Freckles looked surprised, for they had suspected that the outlaw was doing his best to serve them, and was only too glad to do so for his own sake.

But the words of their young leader put them on their guard, and they therefore kept their eyes open to all that was suspicious.

For a couple of hours more the outlaw led the way, and then turned into a canyon penetrating a mountain range, and where the keen eye of Detective Nat at once saw that there was a trail, made by horses, running through it.

The tracks led both ways, the canyon sides were very high, and it was from fifty to a hundred yards in width.

"Now, boy pards, we kin be as safe here as if we was in Junction City, said the outlaw, and he continued:

"You see there is a little hollow in the canyon here, and there is water, grass and wood there, and you can rest without any fear of danger."

Nat laughed, and the outlaw looked at him with surprise, and neither did the other boys see cause for amusement.

"What's so funny, pard?" asked the outlaw.

"Why, that we will be safe here; but the truth is, it is a very dangerous place for you."

"What does yer mean?"

"I mean that we will be safe, but that the danger is for you, for right here you are to die."

"Oh Lord! what is yer giving me?"

"Just this, that I intend to hang you in this canyon, and then take my own way for finding a place of safety and discovering what I would know."

"You think we are tenderfeet but we are not so tenderfooted as you might think, for I know the points of the compass and you have led us toward Junction City not from it, and more, you crossed one trail of yesterday thinking I did not notice it, and if we stayed here long we would soon be caught in a trap you have set for us."

"Now, pard, what you do and say has got to be for your life, for I swear to you I'll stand no more nonsense."

"Keno, bring me that lariat and put a noose around this man's neck."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CONFESSION.

THE outlaw prisoner had turned very pale at New York Nat's words.

He saw that the Ferret captain, if not a Wild Westerner, had caught on to their trail of the day before as they crossed it, and also had been sharp enough to see that he was guiding them wrong.

He did not like the look in Nat's face, and the prompt manner in which Keno had obeyed the order to get the lasso.

There was but one way he now saw to get out of his scrape and he decided to take the course and confess, at least as far as he deemed it necessary to do to save his own life.

So, as Keno threw the noose over his head with no gentle hand, and Freckles calmly pointed to a limb to hang him to, and made some remark about having a horse drag him up, he cried eagerly:

"Yer is onter me, young pard, and I confesses I tried ter do yer, fer in followin' yer trail, Satan Sam would hev sent a party this way fer sure, and I guesses they won't be long in comin' along either."

"But life is sweet and I wanted to git away ther best way I c'u'd."

"As I can't down yer, I'll give in and talk gospil straight, so what does yer promise me if I gives it to yer in a way ter please yer?"

"I'll give you just five minutes to answer my questions, and if I am satisfied you go free, when I've found out if you have told me the truth."

"If you have lied to me then I shall be the judge, these two boys the jury, and we'll try you, and it will not take long for us to find out which horse will act as your hangman, for up you will go."

"I believes yer, pard, for yer looks it ter do what yer says"

"What does yer wish ter know?"

"How far is Junction City from here?"

"Five miles."

"I thought so."

"Now, how long is this canyon?"

"It branches off ahead o' here about half a mile."

"Enough, we will go on now to where it branches off and find a place where we can be secure."

The order was given by Nat to mount and they went on at a gallop to where the canyon branched off into several others.

The trail there could hardly be found, such was the nature of the ground, but Nat's keen eyes did find it and he went into one of the canyons through which it did not lead, paying no heed to his prisoner's advice now very freely offered.

After a ride of half a mile he came to a most fertile spot, an ideal place for a camp, and where there was not the trace of a track other than of duck and coyotes.

It was a blind canyon and went but little further Nat soon found out, so no one went that way as they could not pass on into the mountains.

The horses were staked out, a camping place selected, and while Freckles gathered wood and built a fire, Keno began to prepare supper.

New York Nat meanwhile led his prisoner to where the blankets and saddles had been thrown, and said:

"Sit down there, pard, and have a sober talk, for as I said, your life depends upon what you tell me."

"I'm beginning to feel pretty sart'in o' that now, young pard," answered the man in a disconsolate tone.

"Remember our terms, death if you lie to me, your life if you tell the truth."

"I'll be squar' this time."

"Now to my questions."

"Yas."

"Do you not belong to an outlaw band?"

After a moment of hesitation the man answered in a low tone:

"Yas."

"Is not Satan Sam your leader?"
 "No."
 "Who is?"
 "Well, we know him as Cap'n, that's all."
 "Where is he?"
 "East, just now, I believe."
 "What has Satan Sam to do with the band?"
 "He's lieutenant, and commands the band while the Cap'n's away."
 "How long has the Captain been away?"
 "Seven weeks."
 "What does the band number?"
 "Just now about a dozen, I guess."
 "It was your band that held up Fred Fox's coach some weeks ago when the attempt was made to kidnap Gentleman Jack?"
 "Yas."
 "Were you along that day?"
 The man hesitated.
 "I must have the truth, remember," sternly said Nat.
 "Yas."
 "Who was the miner who was a passenger that day?"
 "Yer means ther day you lit inter ther agents so brash?"
 "You know what day I mean, and I ask you was not that miner your outlaw captain?"
 "I don't just remember."
 "I'll put this lasso about your neck to refresh your memory, and—"
 "Yas, I knows now who yer means—yas, he were our captain."
 "And played Gentleman Jack's friend to betray him?"
 "About that," was the low reply.

CHAPTER XVII.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

"Now a few questions more," resumed New York Nat after a moment of silent meditation.
 "I'm in it to tell all I know, pard," answered the outlaw.
 "And I'm in it to know all, or help fill in your grave," was the significant reply.
 The man shuddered, and Nat asked:
 "You say that your captain is East now?"
 "Yas."
 "Gentleman Jack mysteriously disappeared the night he reached Junction City?"
 "So I has heerd."
 "Do you not know?"
 "I wasn't thar, yer knows."
 "Where were you?"
 "I was dustin' for a place of safety, arter you run us away from the coach."
 "I remember that the old miner went on with us to the station."
 "Yas."
 "Is your captain an old man?"
 "He seems so to us."
 "Well, he appeared like a rough-looking man, with gray hair and beard of a week's growth, while he stooped his shoulders and walked with a limp."
 "The miner who was with Gentleman Jack you mean?"
 "Yes, and your captain too, for I have an idea that they are one and the same, that your outlaw wears a wig and otherwise disguises himself at times."
 New York Nat saw the start the prisoner gave but did not appear to do so.
 But the man said in response:
 "Well, you may be right, young feller, that it were our Capt'in who was the miner in the coach that day, but I can't swear to it, but I guess you know more than you tell me."
 "I know enough to hang you, should I turn you over to a court of justice."
 "But yer won't?"
 "It depends upon you."
 "Now, why was Gentleman Jack to be kidnapped?"

"The Captain know'd, we men didn't."
 "You know that he was kidnapped the night he came into Junction City."
 "I heerd so."
 "Come, I do not believe you know what I wish to learn so you might as well be dead as alive for all that I can get out of you."
 The man cried out eagerly:
 "Pard, I remembers now that Gentleman Jack were tuk in ther night he arriv' in Junction City."
 "By his friend the miner?"
 "Yas."
 "Where was he taken?"
 "To the den."
 "Where is it?"
 "Up in the mountains."
 "You know the way there?"
 "I knows."
 "You know if Gentleman Jack is dead or alive?"
 "He were alive when I seen him last."
 "When was that?"
 "A week ago."
 "What is he being held for?"
 "The Capt'in knows."
 "And does not tell."
 "He may have told Satan Sam but not me and the rest of the gang."
 "Then Gentleman Jack is held as a prisoner?"
 "Yas."
 "How many men are in the camp?"
 "Only one man generally keeps camp, to look after the horses we keeps there, but there is two there now on account of the prisoner."
 "I see, and one keeps guard over him all the time."
 "Yes, for he's no slouch, and though he is ironed lie's hard to hold."
 "You could guide us there?"
 The man started, moved uneasily and said:
 "See here, young pard, don't ask me to do that, for I might as well let you hang me as to do it, as my life wouldn't be worth much."
 "It won't be worth anything if you refuse."
 "You have confessed the truth, I believe, because you were forced to do so, but it was like drawing teeth to get it out of you."
 "Now I want you to go to that den, for you hold the prisoner, Gentleman Jack without any reason for doing so, and he must be released.
 "Do this and you are free to go your way the moment we rescue Gentleman Jack, and I will give you a money consideration too, as well as a good outfit, several horses, and some advice."
 "Advice?"
 "Yes, to get away from this part of the country with all speed, for I intend to run your captain and his band of outlaws down, and you will be about the only one to escape."
 As though acting from some sudden impulse the outlaw said eagerly:
 "I'll go you, young feller, for it do begin to look black for the boys."
 "I'll guide you to the den, and in return I am to get my liberty, some money, an outfit and several horses?"
 "Yes, and some advice."
 "I'll take it all."
 "Hark! what is that?"
 "I didn't hear nothin'."
 "I did."
 "Come, pards, be on the alert for danger, for I heard voices just now down the canyon."
 "I'll go and see what is up and you be ready to fight if fight it must be," and New York Nat called out to his two comrades, left the prisoner in their keeping, and taking his rifle walked rapidly down the canyon.
 He soon came upon a scene that showed him that they were in deadly danger, for desperate foes were on their track.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SATAN SAM ON THE TRAIL.

SATAN SAM was a dangerous man, ever when defeated.

He supposed as he fled from the attack on the trio of young Ferrets that both of his companions fell under their fire.

He saw one man go down, and supposed that the other did too.

He lost no time in making the best of a bad situation, and so sped swiftly along to the ponies of the scouts, sprung upon the back of one and fled.

But a surprise awaited him at the pass, when Keno opened upon him.

He saw that he was in the open, the foe in shelter, and having no time to get his own horse he kept on as he was in his flight.

He was never a slow rider, and he made this time no exception, but kept his horse at a swift pace, anxious to reach Junction City before the men should leave the saloons.

He had a purpose in view.

But he rode too hard and used his horse up, so had to go slow for the rest of the way.

It was after breakfast when he at last reached the tavern at Junction City.

But he had startling news to tell, and was not long in getting an interested audience.

His story was a surprising one to many, for it was in effect that he and his two companions had started for the mines; that they had been ambushed by the three kid miners, and his two companions were killed.

He had been captured, and they had been robbed of all they had, their horses and outfit, and, in fact, the three young miners had turned road-agents.

He had made his escape upon one of their ponies, and so had come to Junction City with all speed, and wanted a band of men to go with him and capture and string up the kid road-agents.

It was but a few minutes before Satan Sam secured the services of over half a score of bold spirits to follow him on the trail of the alleged young road-agents, and a few hours after his arrival in Junction City he was mounted upon his best horse, and with his volunteers following rode forth upon the mission of hanging New York Nat and his two friends for the crimes he had charged them with.

"I tell yer, pards, them boys has been playin' a bold game out here, and hain't nigh so tenderfooted as they pertends ter be and looks," he said when the party of horsemen halted for a rest.

"You sees," he continued, "they was in the mines and went back with plenty o' dust."

"They played the baby act, and yet yer knows how they jumped the road-agents when they held up Fred Fox's coach some weeks ago, and yer seen that young feller, Nat, play his bold bluff on me at keerds."

"Well, them boys hain't no slouch, and they come out here ter play a bluff game fer dust, and my idea is that they are New York crooks, as I heerd that even ther bootblacks and newsboys of that town kin give a man from the country pointers in any game they wishes to play."

"Now, pards, I has preached my sermon, and the text be that we has got ter catch them young fellers and hang 'em—see?"

The men did "see," and the "text" and "sermon" which Satan Sam had "preached" were most convincing.

They were readily converted and willing to follow his lead.

"In course," he resumed, "they will play the baby act and squeal like pigs under a fence."

"They lie about being innocent and will say they was the ones attacked, but I gives the words to string 'em up and try 'em afterwards."

"Now, I guesses the critters has been rested, and we'll push on at a brisk pace ag'in."

With this the party pushed on again, and reached the camp where the attack had been made. The good trailers took up the trail, in spite of the outlaws' pretended precautions to hide it.

They found no trouble in following it, and toward nightfall, by taking cut-offs, as they knew which way the fugitives would have to go, they camped in the canyon which New York Nat and his comrades had left to seek a secure hiding place.

They did not appear to fear being heard, for they laughed and joked around the camp-fire, and it was their voices that New York Nat had heard.

The outlaw prisoner had heard them, too, but had made no move, hoping that the pursuers would soon come upon the camp.

He felt sure that Satan Sam was leading the pursuit, and supposed that he had only the members of his own band, not believing that he had been bold enough to go to Junction City and lay the charge he was guilty of upon the Boy Ferrets.

It was coming upon the camp in the canyon that had shown New York Nat the danger they were in.

CHAPTER XIX

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

NEW YORK NAT had been too long a clever detective not to understand reconnoitering, even if it was on the frontier.

He drew near enough to the camp to see the forms of the pursuers about the fires, and counted thirteen.

"An unlucky number for them, at least," muttered the young Ferret, and he drew nearer to take in the whole situation.

"Ah! Satan Sam is there; yes, and the leader," he said as he recognized the desperado of Junction City.

The recognition, too, convinced him that he and his comrades were in deadliest danger at the hands of the men whom such a man would lead.

Determined to hear as well as see, New York Nat crept nearer, using all the caution and skill of an Indian, and soon gained a clump of pines within fifty feet of the camp-fire.

The men had just sat down to supper, and were laughing and talking among themselves in a tone that plainly reached the ears of the youth in his concealment.

Listening attentively to catch every word, he soon discovered enough to convince him that the daring desperado had played a bold game against them to save himself.

He heard how they were accused of having made the attack on Satan Sam and his two companions, for the whole story was gone over again, and that the men were in pursuit of them to hang them without trial, for the murder of the two men Satan Sam accused them of killing, and for stealing their horses and trying to kill him, Satan Sam, also.

That they had unsuccessfully followed their trail thus far showed that they were in earnest.

The fact that they had not killed the man with them would be no protection, as he would side with Satan Sam against them.

They were in a blind canyon, and there was no escape for them, and they must fight it out if their pursuers followed them there.

That they had not camped in the entrance convinced Nat that they suspected that they had pushed on into the mountains.

There was one thing in their favor, this being that their trail after entering the canyon could not be seen, on account of the nature of the ground.

So New York Nat at once determined upon his course, and hastily retreating from his position he retreated to the blind canyon and his own camp.

He found his comrades and the prisoner awaiting supper for him, and the two young Ferrets were becoming very anxious for the safety of their leader.

The prisoner had also seemed anxious, and had suggested that they go in search of Nat, but this neither Keno or Freckles would listen to.

As Nat drew near the camp he heard the prisoner say:

"I tell yer, I'm going to call out for yer pard, for I don't hear nobody in the big canyon now, and if they hain't kilt him he kin hear us."

"I has a voice like a fog-horn, and I'll jist whoop her up one time and—"

"You give a cry and I'll see that it is your last," was uttered in the stern voice of New York Nat as he suddenly appeared before them, his rifle muzzle pointed directly at the prisoner.

"You would betray us, and purposely, for you know well that the men are in the canyon.

"I have a mind to gag you, and if you speak louder than a whisper I will do so, while if you call out, your pard, Satan Sam, will find you dead when he comes here."

The prisoner saw that Nat was in deadly earnest and he was cowed into silence, while the young detective went on to say:

"Boys, Satan Sam is there and has twelve men with him, most of whom I recognized as men I saw in Junction City.

"He has told them that we attacked him in camp, killed his two comrades and captured him, robbing them all and stealing their horses.

"He is after us to hang us, and they are going to pull out before daybreak and go on up into the mountains, and we will take the back track and hide in a place I remember we passed, and we will leave no trail.

"We could go to Junction City and tell all, but some there might not believe us, and we would lose our chance of rescuing Gentleman Jack and that would never do, so we just go into hiding until Satan Sam and his followers give up the trail.

"Now to have supper, and then we'll get a few hours' rest and be ready to leave here as soon as our pursuers depart from their camp."

This plan was considered the best that could be done, so the Ferrets and their prisoner ate supper, after which Nat gagged the outlaw, and the four laid down to sleep for a few hours.

CHAPTER XX.

IN HIDING.

NAT was awake two hours before dawn, and awaking his comrades told them to get ready to move and come on down the canyon slowly unless they heard from him to the contrary.

The prisoner had passed a wretched night of it, ironed as he was and with the gag in his mouth and he was in a very sullen humor.

"Remove his gag, but knock him in the head if he speaks out of a whisper," Nat had said as he walked away.

He reached the mouth of the blind canyon just as the leading man of the pursuers was riding by and heard one in the rear call out:

"There's a big canyon, pard."

"It's a blind one, only runs a few hundred yards back," was the reply of Satan Sam.

Then the party rode by within a hundred feet of the boy detective.

New York Nat counted them carefully, and found there were thirteen.

As they passed on out of sight he smiled grimly and muttered to himself:

"Well Satan Sam, we are playing another game and we will see who will win."

"Somehow I believe I hold trumps and I shall play them for all they are worth."

"Good! the boys are coming now, and we will get well out of the canyon before day breaks and then, when we reach the brook beyond which the tracks will show we will turn into it and I'll be the guide, for I would not trust that outlaw again on any account, as I am sure he meant to betray us when he wanted to call out for me last night."

In a few minutes the others rode up, and mounting his horse Nat led the way on the back trail.

"See here, pard, I wants ter serve you, and I tells you this trail will lead you wrong," said the prisoner.

"Not so wrong as the one in the other direction would."

"You is wrong, for we would follow on after them and then hide in the mountains, for they would not look to find us following them."

"I'll go my own way, pard, as I've had to do many a time before, and if I go wrong you won't be to blame."

So Nat led the way back over the trackless land through the canyon, and on across a flinty plain until just after sunrise they came to a brook.

Then the strange spectacle was seen of a desert, treeless, grassless and rocky upon one side of the brook, while upon the other side were meadows of juicy grass, trees and rolling hills.

Reaching the brook Nat turned down the stream, a course which would take them nearer to, instead of further from Junction City.

"We can," he explained to his two pards, "if driven to bay, make a run for Junction City and tell our story to the people there."

"Enough will believe it to prevent our being strung up without mercy, though I believe the prisoner would side with Satan Sam against us."

"Now we will find a biding-place and remain there until the band searching for us return to Junction City."

"Then we will try and find the outlaw band's den, rescue Gentleman Jack, and with him and another outlaw prisoner we will have enough proof to back up all our charges against Satan Sam."

This was New York Nat's plan, and with him his two Ferret pards wholly agreed, though the prisoner was dead set against their view of the situation.

Like one reared upon the frontier New York Nat led the way down the stream, the others following, and the prisoner wearing an anxious look upon his face.

Before they turned into the brook Nat and Keno had dismounted and most carefully searched to see if they had left any trace of a trail upon the hard soil.

To their delight they found none, and the bed of the stream was sandy, and quickly all the tracks were obliterated by the flowing waters.

So down the current they rode for several miles, and then they came to a place at which the same flinty soil was found, so that they left the water and soon found a camping place back among a range of hills.

Wood, grass and water were in plenty, the horses could be hemmed up in one of the blind canyons close at hand, and the very spot for a good camp and safe retreat was found.

Not fearing that any foes were near Nat shot a deer, and while the prisoner was put to work cutting it up, Keno and Freckles caught some fine fish in the stream near by.

"We have a safe retreat, a fine camp and are set up with fresh food in plenty, boys, so we can stand it for a few days and then the prisoner here must guide us to his den if he wishes to save his neck."

"You bet I'll do it, and durn me if you hain't sarcumvented Satan Sam if yer is tenderfoot kids," growled the outlaw prisoner.

CHAPTER XXI.

UNDER SUSPICION.

THREE days passed in the Ferrets' camp, they appearing to take matters coolly, while their prisoner fretted greatly.

He said that he expected the camp would be momentarily surprised by Satan Sam.

But Nat had found a point of lookout on a cliff near by which commanded the approaches, and here one of the three Ferrets was constantly on the watch.

Their camp was so located that it could be well defended, and if forced to retreat they could desert their horses, take their prisoner and go to Junction City, leaving their foes in possession of what they could find.

But no outlaws came, and confident that they had given up the pursuit, New York Nat gave the order to move on the fourth morning after their arrival there.

They went back the way they had come, and they were very careful to reconnoiter well ahead.

Going ahead on foot, Nat discovered that the party had returned from its search in the mountains, for there were their tracks, thirteen horses, as plain as could be seen.

They branched off toward Junction City, too, and came right down from the mountains.

The prisoner again looked uneasy, but Nat told him his duty now was to lead to the den.

"You hain't give that up?"

"You bet we hav'n't."

"Well, I guess we can find it."

"I know we can when your life depends upon it."

So the prisoner's face brightened and he led the way once more, bound to his horse and with his hands in irons.

They went up through the canyon and found the place where they had camped when their foes came so near to them.

They had traveled very slowly, going cautiously as they did, and it was nearly dark when they got up in the mountains, the scattering trails of their pursuers showing that they had searched for them by twos and threes.

But no well defined trail followed along on the one that was evidently an old one, and which the prisoner asserted was made by his band going to and from the retreat of the outlaws.

"We can ride right in on 'em at night, surround their cabin and call for them ter come out with their hands up."

"That will fetch them, you bet, only I don't want ter be seen by the boys, yer knows," explained the prisoner.

But New York Nat was wary, and questioned the prisoner most closely until at last he managed to discover that the camp was between two cliffs that formed a valley, and could only be reached by ascending to the top of a range and then descending to the retreat.

"Is the retreat visible from the range?"

"From one point it be."

"Does this trail lead to it?"

"It do."

"Very well, boys, you go into camp here, and I'll push on ahead on foot and see what I can find out."

"No need o' that, for we kin all go together."

"I prefer to go alone," answered Nat.

"It's a dangerous trail."

"I'll keep my eyes open for danger."

"Sure as shootin' yer'll run over a cliff."

"I'll risk it."

"Yer is a durned fool to do it."

"I'll take bigger chances now you urge against it."

"Just keep right by that man, one of you, and finish him if he tunes up or makes any trouble."

"We'll do it," said the boys, and the prisoner smothered an oath between his teeth, while Nat saw that his face paled slightly.

"Keno, I believe that man intends to betray us in some way if we give him the chance," said Nat, and having selected a camping place, he started out alone and on foot.

He followed the faint trail winding up to the top of the range, and coming to the two cliffs that formed the valley, he approached and looked over cautiously.

His face brightened as he saw a number of horses feeding in the valley, and from almost beneath him came a column of white smoke curling upward.

"Ah! I have found the retreat.

"Now to have a better view," and Nat searched about for a better outlook.

He now found a spot that commanded a view of the cabin, and his eyes fell upon something that caused him to smile significantly.

What he beheld was a log cabin just beneath him, and a camp-fire near it, built up against the cliff.

The sun was near setting and the valley was cast in the shadow of approaching night.

About the camp-fire were no less than six men, two of whom were cooking the evening meal.

Three others were lolling near, while a fourth was visible seated by the stump of a tree to which New York Nat even from where he looked down could see that he was bound.

"That man is Gentleman Jack," said Nat as he recognized the man bound to the tree.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN DISGUISE.

WHAT Nat saw in the canyon did not seem to surprise him, and he watched the group of men until darkness closed around them.

He saw the men gather around for supper. The prisoner was with them; but, though his hands were freed, Nat could see that his feet were bound from the manner in which he walked.

More wood was thrown upon the fire, thereby causing a bright light and the group of men were plainly visible to the watcher from the cliff above.

Still watching, New York Nat saw them throw themselves upon the ground and could even hear their voices and laughter.

At last he saw two of them lead the prisoner to the cabin and enter it. Then one by one the others followed and the fire began to die down.

"They appear to keep no watch," muttered Nat, and he began to slowly retrace his way down the mountain trail.

It was moonlight and he had watched well his trail.

Just before midnight he arrived in camp and found Keno and Freckles awaiting him, while the prisoner had retired to his blankets but was not asleep, the boys whispered.

Nat ate a hearty supper his comrades had reserved for him and then said:

"Well, boys, there are six men in the camp."

"Then our man lied?"

"He certainly did, and intended to lead us into a trap."

"But, one of those six men is Gentleman Jack!"

"You saw him, Pard Nat?" cried Keno.

"I did indeed."

"I knew you would find out what was going on," averred Freckles, admiringly.

Nat then went on to tell of his discovery and added:

"Now we dare not attack that camp with five men in it. We might be successful but some of us would go under, beyond a doubt, and I don't want that."

"I want you boys to go back to New

York with me, and I am not hunting for a grave out here for myself.

"If there were but three of them we might risk it."

"That man there tried to lead us into a trap, for he knew the number in the retreat and expected we wou'd be wiped out and he escape, so I shall act now with no consideration for him."

"My idea is to put on one of the disguises we brought with us, have Fred Fox pick me up, for to-morrow is his day to go to Junction City, and I'll make a clean breast of it to him, have him get several men he knows he can trust, and bring them out in his coach."

"You, Freckles, can come down with the horses and meet us, and we will then be strong enough to attack the retreat with every prospect of catching the outfit and rescuing Gentleman Jack."

"This done we can go to Junction City the next night and take in Satan Sam and his outfit."

"That is my plan, so what do you think of it, boys?"

"What disguise will you wear, Nat?"

"I'll rig out like that young parson we saw up in the mines, for I have a suit, a wig and spectacles."

"Good! and you can change the expression of your face so that no one will know you, Pard Nat."

"Freckles will take care of the camp and the prisoner, and I will go with you to the stage-trail and retreat, and we'll have the horses there for you, all six of them," said Keno.

This being decided upon Nat and the others retired to their blankets, but were up at an early hour and Nat was soon rigged out in a clerical suit, and with his wig of rather long hair parted in the middle, and gold rimmed spectacles, no one would have recognized him, for he did possess the faculty of completely changing his facial expression.

The prisoner realized that Nat had made some important discovery, and was preparing for some move, and he was nervous and in a very ugly humor.

After an early breakfast Nat mounted and rode away with Keno, to bring his horse back, while Freckles remained in camp to look after the outlaw prisoner and the horses.

Some hours after, as Fred Fox was driving along the trail toward Junction City, he saw a man seated by the way, and at first he feared his coach was to be held up by road-agents.

But as he drew nearer he muttered, greatly relieved:

"It's a young sky pilot, as I live; but what on earth is he doing here alone, and on foot?"

There was not a passenger in the coach, Nat was delighted to see, and Fred Fox called out to him in his blunt way:

"Say, Pard Gospil Sharp, I guesses you has done what yer tells others not to do—got astray?"

"Yea, verily, my sinful brother, that have I done, for my beast of burden hath left me afoot, and I am forced to seek of you a lift toward the settlement ahead," answered Nat in a tone most doleful to listen to.

"In course that means no money for me or the company; but, I'll give you a ride if you don't try to convert me. So hop up on the box with me and make yourself at home."

Nat, having convinced himself that there was no one aboard, did as he was told, and Fred, having made up his mind to take his pay out in "having some fun" with the "sky pilot," was startled by hearing suddenly:

"Say, Fred Fox, you are a good square fellow, true as steel, I have heard, and I

want you to help me out of a scrape, while, besides doing an all-round good act, you will help yourself, too, for I will not forget you: I am New York Nat, the Boy Miner."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Fred Fox, and then he added:

"I thought yer was a gospil sharp, sure as shootin', though yer did look young for a prayer-slinger."

"Well! well! I'm glad ter see yer, though they does tell ugly tales of you and your pards in Junction City."

CHAPTER XXIII.

NAT'S BOLD GAME.

"THERE is not a word of truth in it, Fred, as I'll prove to you."

"I'll tell you now that I know all that Satan Sam said of us, for I was near his camp and heard him and his men talking," Nat informed.

"He went into Junction City with a great lie about me, and then started out with twelve others to hunt us down."

"Now I'll tell you the whole truth, and I want you to help me out, for you are the man that can do it."

"In the first place, I am going to tell you a secret, and put perfect confidence in you. Then you'll see it all, and know who the men are that have been holding up your coach."

Fred Fox listened with the deepest interest to New York Nat, and heard the whole story of the attack on them, their flight under the guidance of their prisoner, the traps he tried to lead them into, and the discovery of the outlaw den, and Gentleman Jack a prisoner there.

Now Fred Fox thought a great deal of Gentleman Jack, whom he had known for a year or more, and had a warm spot in his heart for the Boy Miner Nat, and he said with great energy:

"I see it all now, boy pard, and how Satan Sam tried to save his neck by just accusing you."

"I've suspected him for some time, and I tell you I'm right in this thing with you clean up to my neck, and in it to stay, too."

"I'll see you through; but what'll we start in on when we gets to ther city?"

"Tell the landlord that I am a Boy Preacher from the mines, come to Junction City to meet a friend."

"Of course, that friend will not come, and I want you to pick your men, say six of them, to go back with me."

"They must pretend to be going on a prospecting tour, and go out in your coach day after to-morrow, and I'll go too."

"When we reach the spot where you picked me up we will leave you, and my pard Freckles will be near them with the horses, and I'll buy a couple more animals in Junction City, and have you lead them out for me."

"That you must get men whom you can wholly trust, you well know."

"You bet I know, and I'll get men that will do just as you say, for you are the captain, boy pard."

"They will not be unforgotten, Fred, for—"

"Now don't go to offering pay, for to catch those road-agents will be all the reward they want."

"Well, those are the kind I want, and you know whom you can trust."

"But, Fred, as I am in bad odor in Junction City, I want you to do me the favor to get my letters from the post-office for me."

"They will be addressed simply to Nathaniel Chandler, Special Agent, Junction City, with the words written on it:

"Deliver only to bearer of seal stamped hereon."

"I'll get them."

"And here is the seal, and you can stamp it upon the letter to show you have the right

to get the letters, and say the one to whom they are addressed sent you for them, so I need not be known in the matter."

"Then, too, I want you to buy two good horses, saddles and bridles, for those men, and they had better ride them, starting out ahead of the coach, I guess."

"I'll do just as you tells me, boy pard; but oh! how much you does look like a sky pilot! why, you'd fool your mammy."

"Now we is nearin' Junction City, so jist talk fast if thar is anything else to be done."

Nat did talk fast, and a quarter of an hour after, when the stage drew up at the tavern, Fred Fox fully understood what was to be done.

The "Boy Preacher" was introduced with a flourish by Fred Fox to the landlord, and so perfect was Nat's disguise that not a soul who had seen him before suspected who he was.

"He's been doing a pow'ful lot o' good in ther lower mines, scrapin' sinners out o' hell fire, and I only wish he had a chance to do the same in Junction City, for if ever thar was a gang o' sinful folks gathered tergether in a commonnity, this is ther place."

"Why, if ye'd dig down a few rods in this town, the ground would burn yer, Hades is so near," said Fred.

But the "Boy Preacher" hastened to his room, passing on the way Satan Sam, who, seeing him, burst out into a rude laugh and called out:

"Lord hev marcy, landlord, what hev yer got thar?"

"A boy preacher, Satan Sam, and I guesses he'll be after you."

"Yes, my mission is fighting the devil, and I'll give you a call," said Nat in his most sepulchral tones.

"I'm blowed ef yer will," answered Satan Sam as he walked on, while Nat was conducted to his room by the landlord, who said:

"I wishes yer c'u'd stay about Junction City fer a meetin', parson, fer it do be gettin' mighty wicked here."

"Maybe I will be able to give the sinners in your town a turn," answered Nat, but the landlord did not see the significance of the remark.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LETTERS FROM THE EAST.

CONGRATULATING himself upon having such a good ally as Fred Fox, New York Nat determined to keep as much in his room as possible.

He had passed successfully through the ordeal of the landlord. Satan Sam and several others unrecognized, and he believed and hoped that he could remain unsuspected.

So far all was going well, and he quietly awaited the coming of Fred Fox, whose first act was to go to the post-office for him.

About an hour after his arrival, the stage-driver came in bringing with him several letters for Nat.

"I'll git supper now, pard, and you hed better do ther same."

"Then, I'll light out on the trail o' ther men I wants."

"All right, only say nothing to them about the work in hand."

"I sabe."

"Let them think they are going to the mines with you, and tell them their fare will be paid on the coach, for I'll attend to that."

"All right."

"Here is the money to buy me the two horses and the outfit, and also a few supplies that we had best have on hand in case we need them with our extra numbers."

"Now, I will go down to supper with you and read my letters afterward."

Nat gave the driver a roll of bills, and then pocketing his letters he went down to the supper table.

Wing Lung waited upon him and gave him the best the tavern afforded, but did not appear to recognize the Boy Ferret in the pretended Boy Preacher.

After eating his supper Nat escaped to his room, for he began to realize that the men about the tavern wanted to hear him preach.

He pleaded a bad cold to the landlord, and reaching his room hastily began to open his mail.

One letter was from his lieutenant in charge of the Boy Police band in his absence, and was a report of all that had gone on since his departure, ending with a hope that he would be successful in his venture and soon return.

It also ended with kind regards from all in the band to Nat, Keno and Freckles.

Another letter was from Sherman Canfield, his ally and friend, and told him how matters were going with him, while he said that the chief of the Secret Service asked him often what had become of his Unknown Detective.

"Hasten back, Nat, for there is work for you to do here, other crooked trails for you to run down and wicked men and women to entrap," was what the letter ended with.

The third letter was from the Mascot Queen of the Boy Police, Olive.

He opened it last like one who knew that it contained the most important news.

After a few words about having greatly missed her brother and hoping that he would soon return crowned with success, the letter went on to say:

"All goes well with the band, but the boys are bringing in information of crooks that will need you to deal with, though I try to do all that I can, and our good pards do also."

"But we miss you sadly, and hampered as I am by my place of lady's maid, I can do but little, as I get out but one evening in each week."

"Now to matters here. I can tell you some things that will surprise you."

"There is a man in the case as well as a woman, in fact two women."

"I have discovered that one or both of the women, Mrs. Hammond and her daughter, are playing some deep, desperate game."

"In fact, I know now that Mr. Hammond is the victim of a fiendish plot to put him out of the way."

"Some one is poisoning him."

"I took the medicine given me by Mrs. Hammond for her husband, after Miss Benson had taken it from me, as is always her habit, and substituting a glass I had already prepared, I placed the other aside."

"Finding an excuse to go out, I took the medicine glass to a chemist and had him analyze it."

"His report, written, was to the effect that it contained a subtle poison—one that would slowly but surely destroy life if given regularly in small doses."

"That was enough for me, for I knew that my suspicions were correct: that Mr. Hammond was surely being poisoned."

"But by whom?"

"Either Mrs. Hammond changed his medicine for that subtle poison and had me give it to him, or her daughter changed it after I took it to his room."

"To complicate matters, the man in the case appeared."

"He is a man of forty, handsome, distinguished looking, but if he is not a villain, then his face belies him."

"I mean a soft, clever, velvet scoundrel."

CHAPTER XXV.

A MIDNIGHT CALLER.

Nat smiled as he read the way that Olive described the villain, but interested greatly in all that he had read, he continued the letter, which was as follows:

"The man called one day when the mother was out, and I went to the door."

"His appearance at once struck me, and I became interested in him."

"He asked for Mrs. Hammond, and the card I carried up had on it:

"WALTER BENSON,

"Golden Gleam Mine,

"Arizona."

"I gave Mrs. Hammond the card and she uttered an exclamation, but whether of surprise or pleasure I could not determine."

"She at once went down to the parlor and closed the door behind her."

"This shut me out from hearing, though I did overhear very earnest conversation, and the visitor remained all of two hours."

"Then he left, and that night returned and asked for Miss Benson."

"She also closed the door behind her, and the conversation was again rather loud and earnest, and yet I could only catch a word here and there, that I may be able to put together after I learn more."

"He this time remained but half an hour and when he left I saw Miss Benson; her face was pale and an angry light flashed in her eyes."

"This man, Walter Benson, repeated his visit daily, at one time asking for Mrs. Hammond, again for Miss Benson, and only once seeing the two together."

"In each case the door was always tightly closed, and I could learn nothing; but now I have arranged a plan to know what passes between him and one of the two, for I am going to pretend to leave the house and then hide in an alcove in the parlor which is curtained off for a beautiful piece of statuary."

"It has a curtain behind it, and just space enough for me to hide in, and so I can hear all if I do not see, for it is in the back parlor that the ladies always receive their visitor, whose name you note is Benson."

After reading a page or two further, and upon another subject, the letter closed, but a postscript followed.

The P. S. was dated the next day and was as follows:

"I went to see Mr. Sherman Canfield, to learn if he knew of Mr. Walter Benson of Arizona."

"He told me that he had heard of a gambler in Arizona by the name of Benson, and who was also known as Wild Walter."

"He said that he was known as an all-round bad man, and once he had seen him, so he is going to try and get a look at this visitor to the Hammond mansion."

"Mr. Canfield also told me that Wild Walter had a beautiful wife with him in that wild country, and several men were killed about her."

"I will write you again in a few days."

"Lovingly,
"OLIVE."

This letter like the former one was written in the peculiar cipher known to New York Nat and Olive alone.

The letter set Nat to thinking, and he was startled from his reveries by hearing a light tap at the door.

Opening it, and prepared to meet friend or foe, Nat beheld Wing Lung glide suddenly into the room! A curious smile lit up his face, while he said in a whisper:

"Wing Lung no big fool like 'Melican man—me sabe Nat allee samee be Preacher Boy."

"You are as cunning as a fox, Wing Lung," and Nat grasped the hand of the Chinaman who had so cleverly penetrated his disguise and recognized him where others had failed to do so.

"Me tellee news to Nat," continued Wing Lung in the lowest of whispers

"Well, Wing Lung?"

"Wing Lung know Satan Sam and allee bad 'Melican man with him."

"Havee spottee allee road-agents.

"He tellee big lie on Boy Preacher, and he heap bad man, Satan Samee be."

"Me havee allee down fine, and write name of allee band—see!"

Nat looked at the slip of paper shown him by Wing Lung and replied with a smile:

"Yes, I see, Wing Lung, but that is all Greek to me; but you can translate it for me."

"Loo Choo, he writtee 'Melican man tonguee, and he tellee Nat all."

"Meet him to-morrow night allee samee place, and havee Loo Choo with me."

"All right, Wing Lung," answered Nat, and after some minutes' further conversation in the same low tone, New York Nat let Wing Lung glide out of the door, and then he retired to rest, well pleased with the way matters were shaping both with Olive in the East, and himself in the Wild West.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAUGHT NAPPING.

As he found that he would be expected to "peach," New York Nat played possum the next day and remained in bed, feigning sickness.

Fred Fox called upon him twice, and gave him to understand that he had bought the horses, their outfit and the supplies, and had the six men all ready to start the next morning.

Two of them would leave ahead of the coach on horseback, the others going as passengers.

There were no passengers so far save those who were to go with Fred Fox on the secret expedition, and this was fortunate.

Still, others might come in on the night train, Fred said.

Wing Lung carried Nat his meals, so the young Ferret did not have to go out and meet him and Loo Choo at night, but had a list of names given him by the Chinaman.

The next morning Nat was up early to take the coach, and walked like one who was quite feeble, while he had his head tied up and looked the picture of despair, like one suffering with excruciating toothache.

There were only the four men whom Fred Fox had corralled on the coach, and away it rolled—Nat, ill though he pretended to be, saying he would ride for awhile on the box.

Thus he and the driver arranged their plans, and the two horsemen were soon overtaken and kept up with the coach.

The six men were fine specimens of manhood, and were armed to the teeth.

They knew that Fred Fox wanted them for some good and dangerous deed, but never once had suspected that the Boy Preacher was in it, too.

When Fred at last drew rein at the spot where he had picked Nat up on the way in, he said:

"Come out, pards, and let me interdooce yer all to yer young cap'n."

"This hain't sich a sky pilot as he looks, but the Boy Miner, New York Nat, whom Satan spun sich a yarn against."

"Take off yer coverin', boy pard, and let ther boys see yer as yer is, and he'll tell yer what is ter be did, for I has ter drive on ter ther mines, but expects ter hear a good report of yer when I gits back."

To the surprise of the men they now recognized the Boy Miner, who had helped Fred Fox out in the attack of the road-agents, had bluffed Satan Sam at a game of cards, and then was accused by the latter of being a road-agent.

In a few words Nat made his story known, and then giving a signal agreed upon, Freckles rode into sight, riding one horse and leading others, all saddled and bridled.

Bidding Fred Fox good-by, and telling him they would gladly follow the lead of the young Ferret and rescue his friend, Gen-

tleman Jack, at the same time trapping his kidnappers, the six men mounted and followed New York Nat and Freckles on the trail to the mountain camp of the Gamin Detectives, who were playing such a bold game in the Wild West.

It was nearly sunset when they rode into the camp, and were greeted by Keno.

The outlaw prisoner was there, gagged as well as bound, for Keno would take no chances when alone.

As the gag was removed for him to eat supper, he begged piteously for his life, and New York Nat answered:

"I will spare it upon one condition."

"I'll do it."

"You are to lead us to the cabin, knock and tell the men who you are, and that you have a message from Satan Sam."

"I'll do it."

"When we have the gang safe, and prisoner rescued, you shall have a horse and outfit, and be set free, as soon as we reach a point near Junction City; but if you do not get out of this country quick, then you'll have to hang."

"God knows I'll go," was the eager answer.

After supper the six men and the three Ferrets and their prisoner mounted and rode away up the mountain trail.

The prisoner, to show his good faith, now that he was fairly caught, had, at Nat's demand, given him the names of four men besides Satan Sam who belonged to the road-agent band, and frankly confessed that they would find five men in the camp, adding:

"There was thirteen of us, including the Captain, and you know you killed Buster when we jumped your camp."

Glancing at the names given him by Loo Choo, Nat saw that they were the same that the outlaw gave him, so muttered:

"These are right."

"We'll get the whole band except the Captain, who is East, for this fellow is to go free, and Buster is in his grave."

They soon came to the cliff, from whence a view of the retreat could be seen, and all saw the outlaws gathered about the fire, and the prisoner near, and who was recognized by several as Gentleman Jack.

They rode slowly along the ridge for a mile, then left their horses staked out and continued on foot, the prisoner, with his hands bound behind his back, and gagged so that he could give no alarm, leading the way.

When they had descended the rugged trail to the valley, they saw that the camp-fire was deserted, the men had retired to their cabin, and the midnight visitors advanced slowly to make their call upon the unsuspecting outlaws.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FERRETS SPRING THEIR TRAP.

"SAY, pard, let me in!"

It was the outlaw prisoner who spoke, and he rapped heavily upon the cabin door.

Voices were heard within, and the name of the man was asked and given, while as the door was thrown open several asked:

"Anything gone wrong, pard?"

The answer was in New York Nat's voice, for Winchesters covered the man nearest the door, and he called out:

"Hands up, all of you, for your cabin is surrounded, and it is death to resist!"

But those desperate men, banded together to rob and kill, were not the ones to surrender tamely, and at once there was a sharp cracking of revolvers, and over a score of shots had been fired and men were dropping dead in and out of the cabin before a cry came for quarter.

Then three outlaws, one of them wounded, held up their hands and stepped out into the bright moonlight, one of them crying, as his eyes fell upon their betrayer:

"Curse you, you are the traitor—there goes my last shot!"

The traitor outlaw uttered a cry of terror, and tried to dodge, but the bullet crashed through his brain and he dropped dead, while New York Nat said:

"It is a fitting fate for him, though I intended to set him free. There are two of our boys dead, you say?"

"Yes; and one of your boy pards is slightly wounded."

"It is you, Keno; but I got it also in the arm, though I am glad that neither wound is serious."

"Now to Gentleman Jack."

"Here to answer for himself, though bound hands and feet, so I could not help you, pards," came a voice over in the corner of the large cabin.

The prisoner was quickly brought out and freed from his bonds, and then he said:

"Ah! it is my Boy Champion of the stage coach attack!"

"I owe you all my life, for those men intended to kill me in the end, I am sure, as soon as their chief returned from the East, whither he has gone upon a mission of deviltry I can now stop if it is not too late," and Gentleman Jack shook hands all around with his rescuers.

Then one of the men looked to the wounds of Nat and Keno, and found them slight, but dressed them in a very skillful manner.

The wounded outlaw was also cared for, and then the whole party sought rest.

But bright and early the camp was active. A search revealed that the outlaws had two score of horses in the valley, half of which Nat at once turned over to his miner allies, four in number, who had aided him in the rescue; and he also gave them the booty found in the camp, so that they fared well.

The dead men were buried—the outlaws apart from the slain rescuers—and by noon the party was ready to start upon the return.

They picked up their horses on the range, and after a rest and supper, started for a night ride for Junction City.

Two of the men rode on ahead to spot the other members of the outlaw band, and when Nat and the others arrived, he, Gentleman Jack and their companions entered the saloon where all of the gang were to be found.

In an instant Satan Sam and his pals found themselves covered and their surrender demanded.

There were several to resist, but these only anticipated their death a short while, as Satan Sam and the others, as soon as Gentleman Jack's story was heard, were seized, dragged out to the nearest tree and quickly strung up for their crimes, for there is no mercy in frontier justice.

Having learned that the chief of the outlaws, under the name of the "Prospector Prince," was a man whom he very much wished to meet, Nat went to his cabin, kept in his absence by a Chinaman, and, Wing Lung and Loo Choo were allowed to make a search of the premises.

What was discovered caused Nat to start East the next night on the Midnight Express train, and he was not only accompanied by Keno and Freckles, his faithful Ferret pards, but also by Gentleman Jack.

The sale of the horses found in the outlaw camp had brought the trio of Ferrets a very snug sum, and their fellow rescuers were more than delighted with their share of the spoils.

Upon arriving in New York, Nat took the liberty of taking his frontier pard, Gentleman Jack, to stop with Sherman Canfield, and then his first duty was to go to his own quarters in the old rookery, call his band together, put them upon the track of Walter Benson of Arizona, and next to send a messenger for Olive.

The young girl came quickly, and Nat

went with her to where Sherman Canfield and Gentleman Jack awaited them.

That each of the three mostly interested ones had a story to tell, now that the Ferrets had sprung their trap, we may well assume.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

REVELATIONS.

It was Olive who told her story first, and what she said was in effect that she had overheard, from her place of concealment in the parlors of the Hammond mansion, conversations between both Mrs. Hammond and Miss Benson, and their visitors.

She had discovered that Miss Benson was not the daughter of Mrs. Hammond, but that the latter was the wife of Walter Benson, and had shared his fortunes, and at one time had been a dealer of faro in her sport husband's gambling saloon.

The two had done one good act, for they had cared for the dying mother of Helen, whose name was Harwood, and had adopted the girl when she was just entering her teens.

She had been sworn to say that she was their own child, and so far had kept her oath.

Then Mrs. Benson had met Mr. Hammond, who had gone West to look after some mines he was largely interested in, and had completely fascinated him—he believing she was, as she said, divorced from her husband.

Entering with her husband into a plot to get Mr. Hammond's money, she had secured a divorce and soon after married the man she was plotting against, to carry out her mercenary schemes.

Finding that Jack Hammond was in the way, and how his fortune was left to him, the bad, bold woman had arranged with her first husband to get Jack out of the way, that husband having remained West and had become a chief of road-agents in addition to his other deeds of evil.

So Jack had been run down, kidnapped, held a prisoner, while Walter Benson came East to see just how the affair stood.

He found matters working well, for Mrs. Hammond was each day administering poison to her husband, as she thought, but, in reality, Helen Benson was preventing the invalid from taking the poisonous doses and giving him strengthening medicines instead.

For her kindness to her dying mother, and afterward to herself, Helen did not wish to betray the beautiful fiend, and so simply plotted to circumvent her, until when Walter Benson called for her, to see if he could not get her to join them in his plot, she denounced him as a villain, and told him that if ever he came to that house again she would have him arrested; while to Mrs. Hammond she said that she was going to take Mr. Hammond away for a change, so that he could get well; and if she did not leave him, upon some excuse she could trump up, she would send her to prison, but she wished to spare the guilty couple for their kind acts to her mother.

She also said that she would find Jack Hammond and have him come home to thwart them.

All this Olive, the Queen of the Secret Boy Police, overheard, and she at once made known to Helen Benson that she was New York Nat's sister, and then in the mansion as a detective.

When Jack Hammond heard all he said sternly:

"Our first duty is to have the intended murderers arrested."

"No," demurred Nat; "Miss Helen Harwood's conditions are that Mrs. Hammond shall escape, and be allowed to leave the country, while, to avoid all publicity, I can arrest Walter Benson and carry him to the West again, to be tried for kidnapping Mr. Hammond and also as the chief of the road-

agents. We have all the proof against him that we need, Mr. Hammond."

"We certainly found enough proof of his guilt to hang a dozen men, when we searched his cabin in Junction City, Nat," Gentleman Jack replied.

And so it was decided, that Nat should call upon Mrs. Hammond, while Sherman Canfield arrested Walter Benson.

The woman would be given a few hours to leave the city, and then Helen Harwood should make known to Mr. Hammond the deep and damnable plot against him.

And this plan was fully carried out that very day.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

MRS. HAMMOND, with her guilt known, was only too anxious to leave the country, with the few thousand dollars she had laid by, and her jewels, too, being her own. Nat escorted her aboard a steamer bound for Liverpool!

Then, with Walter Benson as a prisoner he returned to the West, accompanied by Keno and Freckles, and turned their man over for trial, giving all proofs against him.

This could end in but one way, and that was at the end of a rope, for the wicked man was quickly tried and strung up.

Returning to New York, Nat found Olive still in the Hammond mansion, nominally as maid, but really as Miss Harwood's companion, for awhile.

The whole story had been told to Mr. Hammond, and, after the first shock was over, he began rapidly to improve, and the presence of his noble son was far better than medicine for him.

Jack had not returned poor, either, for he had dug quite a fortune out of the mines.

It is not strange that he soon fell desperately in love with the beautiful Helen who had been the means of saving his own and his father's lives, and the chances are that she will soon become the wife of Gentleman Jack Hammond.

As for New York Nat, the fair Mascot Olive, and Keno and Freckles, they dropped quietly out of sight, for their mission was done; they had accomplished their work, played their game and won, so were shuffling their cards for another Secret Service deal.

But, more: they were proud to number, sa the members of their band, none other than Wing Lung and Loo Choo, who had returned East with Nat and his Kid Detectives.

THE END.

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